

The Spirit Of Holiness

A.B. Simpson:

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" 1 Peter i: 2.

It would throw a flood of light on the perplexing doctrine of election if we would remember, when thinking of this subject, that we are elected by God, not unto salvation unconditionally and absolutely, but unto holiness. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. It is idle and unscriptural, therefore, to talk about being elected to salvation irrespective of our faith or obedience. We are elected to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ, and are summoned, therefore, to make our calling and election sure, by pressing on into the fullness of the grace of Christ. This work of sanctification is especially the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us look carefully at the principles that lie at the foundation of it, and its connection with the person and work of the Holy Ghost.

1. The holiness to which we are called, and into which we are introduced by the Holy Spirit, is not the restoration of Adamic perfection, or the recovery of the nature we lost by the fall. It is a higher holiness, even the very nature of God Himself, and the indwelling of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, to whose perfect likeness we shall be restored through the work of redemption. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. This will determine all our subsequent conclusions in the consideration of this subject. Sanctification is not the perfection of human character, but the impartation of the divine nature, and the union of the human soul with the person of Christ, the new Head of redeemed humanity.

2. Our sanctification has been purchased for us through the redemption of Christ. By one offering He has perfected forever all them that are sanctified. When He came He said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is in my heart, by which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Our sanctification, therefore, as well as our justification, was included in the finished work of Christ, and it is a free gift of His grace to every ransomed soul that accepts it, in accordance with His word and will. It is one of our redemption rights in Christ, and we may claim it by faith as freely as our forgiveness. "For He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

3. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to lead us into the full redemption of Jesus Christ, and therefore, into holiness. In pursuance of this heavenly calling, the Holy Spirit leads us first to see our need of sanctification. This He does by a two-fold revelation. First, He shows us the divine will for our sanctification, and the necessity for our becoming holy if we could please God. By nature and tradition many persons are prone to take a very different view of this subject, and to regard the experience of holiness as a sort of exceptional life for a few distinguished Christians, but not expected of all the disciples of Christ. But the awakened and startled mind discovers, in the light of Scripture and of the Holy Spirit, the falseness of this delusion, and the inflexible terms in which God's Word requires that all His people should be holy in heart and life. In the searching light of truth it trembles as it reads, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Into heaven there entereth nothing that defileth, nor worketh abomination, nor maketh a lie." "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have right to the Tree of Life and may enter in through the gates into the city." "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness shall see the King in His beauty and behold the land that is very far off." "Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord or stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." "Be ye holy even as I am holy; be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "These things have I written unto you that ye sin not. He that abideth in Him sinneth not; he that sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him."

At this point the soul is compelled to face a very solemn crisis; either it must accept the Word of God literally and implicitly, or it must turn it aside by human tradition, and explain away its most plain and emphatic teachings, and render it of no effect in any of its promises or commands, and so enter upon a course which must end in practical infidelity. The latter alternative is taken by many; they content themselves with saying such a standard is impossible, nobody has ever reached it, and God does not actually mean it or require it. The result is that henceforth the Word of God becomes uncertain to them in all its messages, a practical faith ceases to be possible. But the other alternative drives the soul, if honestly faced, to self-despair; it can find no such holiness in itself, and no power to produce it.

The first effect, it is true, generally is to stir up the awakened heart to attempt a better life and try to work out a

holiness such as God requires. Resolutions, outward amendments, perhaps many inward exercises, self-examinations, purposes of righteousness, and holiness, are the result. But in a little while there is a certain issue of failure and disappointment; perhaps the man becomes a Pharisee and deludes himself into the idea that he is complying with the divine standard. But, if the Holy Ghost is doing His office work thoroughly, he will soon become disgusted with his own righteousness, and find his utter inability even to reach his own standard. Some crucial test will come which he cannot meet, some command which strikes at the roots of his natural inclinations and requires the sacrifice of his dearest idols, and the poor heart will break down, and the will will shrink or rebel.

This was the experience of the apostle Paul; for the time he thought that he had attained unto the righteousness of the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. The Lord said "Thou shalt not covet," and instantly his throbbing heart awoke with all the intensity of its natural life, to a thousand evil desires, all the stronger because they were forbidden, until in despair he cried out "I know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Ah! this is the very preparation for sanctification. He is just on the verge of deliverance. He has found at length his helplessness. He has got down to the bottom of the ladder of self-renunciation. It is to such a soul that the Master is saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

So of old, God came to Job in the revelation of his own worthlessness until he cried, "I abhor myself." So He came to Isaiah, just before his cleansing, until the prophet smote upon his breast and cried, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips." Happy the heart that can see itself at its worst, without, on the one hand attempting to excuse its failure, or on the other, giving up in despair. For such a soul the Holy Spirit waits to bring the next stage of His blessed work of sanctification namely:

4. The revelation of Jesus Christ Himself as our sanctification. It is the purpose of God that the person of Jesus shall be to us the embodiment of all that there is in God and salvation. Therefore, sanctification is not a mere human experience or state, but is the reception of the person of Christ as the very substance of our spiritual life. For He "is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption." It is not a wealthy friend advancing us the money to pay our debts, but it is the friend coming into our business and assuming it Himself, with all its burdens and liabilities, while we simply become subordinate and receive all our needs henceforth from Him. This was the glad cry which Paul sent back the moment he had reached the depths of self-despair: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is the Holy Spirit's function to reveal Him. "He shall take of the things of Christ and show them to us."

And so in the light of His revealing we behold Christ, the perfect One, who walked in sinless perfection through the world in His incarnation, waiting to come and enter our hearts, and dwell in us, and walk in us, as the very substance of our new life, while we simply abide in Him, and walk in His very footsteps. It is not merely imitating an example, but it is living in the very life of another. It is to have the very person of Christ possessing our being; the thoughts of Christ, the desires of Christ, the will of Christ, the faith of Christ, the purity of Christ, the love of Christ, the unselfishness of Christ, the single aim of Christ, the obedience of Christ, the humility of Christ, the submission of Christ, the meekness of Christ, the patience of Christ, the gentleness of Christ, the zeal of Christ, the works of Christ, manifest in our mortal flesh, so that we shall say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." When the Holy Spirit thus reveals Him to the heart we can surely say, as a saint once said after such a vision, "I have had such a sight of Christ that I never can be discouraged again."

5. But the Spirit not only reveals Christ, but He actually brings him to occupy and abide in the heart. It is not enough to see, we must receive Him and become personally united to Him through the Holy Ghost. In order to do this there must be, on our part, a complete surrender and self-renunciation, followed by a definite act of appropriating faith. By it we receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and become filled with the Holy Ghost. In both of these we are led and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Through His gracious influence we present our bodies a living sacrifice, yield ourselves unto God in unreserved consecration, hand over to Him the old life of self and sin to be slain and buried forever, and offer ourselves to His absolute ownership, possession, and disposition, unconditionally and irrevocably. The more definite and thorough this act of surrender, then the more complete and permanent will be the result. It is true that, at the best, it will be an imperfect consecration, and will need His merits to make it acceptable, but He will accept a sincere and single desire, and will add His own perfect consecration to our imperfect act, thus making it acceptable to the Father through His grace.

It is most blessed to know that in the very first act of a consecrated life we are not alone, but He Himself becomes our consecration, as He will afterwards become our obedience, and our strength step by step to the end. Having thus surrendered ourselves to Him for His sanctifying grace, we must next accept Him in His

fullness that He does become to us henceforth all that we take Him for, and that we are now owned, accepted, possessed, cleansed and sanctified by His indwelling, and that He is saying to us, and, recording our glad amen, without reserve, to every word of it. "Now are ye clean through the word that I have spoken unto you." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

6. The Holy Spirit next seals this act of union by His own manifested presence, and He makes us know that we have the abiding of Jesus by the witness of His presence, and the baptism of His love and power. Before, however, we can expect to receive this, we must simply believe the promise of Christ, resting in the certainty of our acceptance and consecration, and begin to act by implicit faith in Him as already in our hearts. When we do so, the Holy Ghost will not withhold the conscious witness of our blessing a moment longer than is really necessary for the testing and establishing of our faith.

He will become to us a most blessed and personal reality, and it shall be true of us, as the Master Himself promised, after the Comforter has come, "at that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you." The soul will be filled with the delightful consciousness of the presence of God, sometimes as the Spirit of ineffable rest and holy serenity, sometimes as the Spirit of unutterable holiness, filling the heart as with the searching and consuming fire of divine purity. Sometimes the consciousness will be that of an intense hatred of sin, and a spirit of self-renunciation and holy vigilance. Sometimes it will be a spirit of love, an intense consciousness of the divine approval, and of God's delight in us and love to us, until the heart is melted with the sense of His tenderness. Sometimes it is a Spirit of unspeakable joy and rapture, continuing for days together, until the very tides of God's bosom seem to swell within the heart with unutterable glory. Sometimes it is a very quiet, simple consciousness, prompting one rather to walk by faith moment by moment, and abide in Christ in great simplicity for every instant's need; and there is no transcendent emotion, but simply a satisfying consciousness of Christ sufficient for our practical life. But in every case it is really satisfaction, and we know that the Lord has come to abide with us forever, and be our all-sufficiency, and our everlasting portion.

7. The Holy Spirit now begins to lead us in the steppings of a holy life. We find it is to be maintained by the moment. We have no crystalized and stereotyped condition of self-centred life, but we have Christ for the present moment, and must abide in Him by the moment. We must walk in the Spirit, and we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. We must be filled with the Spirit, and we shall have no room for sin. It is now that we find the importance of walking in the Spirit, and maintaining steadfastly the habit of obedience and fellowship with Him as the essential condition of the life of holiness. One of the first and most important lessons is to hearken to His voice. The minding of the Spirit is life and peace, but the minding of the flesh is death. The Spirit is given, we are distinctly told, to them that obey Him; and the disobedient and inattentive heart will find His fellowship constantly liable to be interrupted and suspended. The life of holiness is not a mere abstract state, but a mosaic, made up of a thousand minute details of life and action.

A Christian lady, while thinking of the subject of sanctification, found herself suddenly absorbed in a sort of waking vision, in which she seemed to see a builder erecting an edifice of stone. First, she saw a deep excavation, and at the bottom of it a solid rock on which the house was to be planted. Across this rock was written the name of Christ, with the words, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Then a derrick swung before her eyes and a stone was deposited in the rear of the building. It was a very plain looking block of granite, with no decorations whatever on its face, and as it was deposited, in an obscure portion of the wall was the word "Humility." Next, the derrick swung around to the front of the wall and planted another foundation stone on the principal corner, and the name of this was "Faith." The walls now rose rapidly; block after block of enduring granite was planted and cemented, and at length was fashioned into a magnificent arch surrounded by a beautiful cornerstone, the most lonely stone in all the building, and across it was written the name, "Love." Between these principal stones the interstices were filled up with innumerable small pieces of every size and shape, and these were variously named by the qualities of the Christian character, such as meekness, gentleness, temperance, forbearance, patience, considerateness, serenity, courtesy, cheerfulness, etc., and then the whole facade was spanned by one glowing word in golden letters, "Sanctification." The prejudices of a lifetime were at once removed, and she saw the loveliness of a holy life and character, and the true meaning of the word that she had so long misconceived and disliked.

This, then, is the Holy Spirit's work in the life, and holiness; it is much more than a mere blank sheet of spotless white; it is the living portrait wrought out upon that sheet in all the lineaments of holy loveliness, and all the positive qualities of a practical and beautiful Christian life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, temperance, and faith," and "whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

These things the Holy Spirit comes to transcribe in our hearts and to reflect in our lives, and yet these qualities are not our own, in any sense in which we could claim them as the result of our own goodness, or rest in them as permanent, personal attributes. They are rather to be regarded as the grace of Christ, supplied to us from His own indwelling Spirit moment by moment. "And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." This is the grace to produce in us all the varied graces of the Christian life. As Peter expresses it, "We are called to show forth the excellencies of Christ," rather than our own, "who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." These are the bridal robes which are granted to the Lamb's wife, "that she should be arrayed in raiment clean and white." These are like Rebecca's ornaments and veil, which are not woven by her hands, but brought her by Eleazar from Isaac himself, and which she had simply to put on and wear as his gifts.

So, the Holy Ghost, typified by Abraham's servant, brings to us the wedding robe, and supplies to us day by day the special garment that fits us for each new situation and emergency, and we simply put on the Lord Jesus and walk in Him as our all-sufficiency for every place of duty and trial. The Spirit is ever present to reveal Him to us in every new aspect of grace and fullness; and every new need or failure is but an invitation to take Him in greater fullness, and prove in a higher sense that He is indeed able to save unto the uttermost, and to keep unto the end. Not only does the Holy Spirit thus lead us into the positive graces of the Christian life, but He also keeps us perpetually cleansed from all the stains of spiritual defilement, and even from the effects of temptation and evil suggestion. If sin should touch the heart but for a moment, He is there to reveal instantly the evil and in the same flash of light to present and apply a remedy. "And, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ keeps cleansing us from all sin."

Thus the soul, like the pebble in the stream, lets in the perpetual cleansing of His life. Indeed, we may walk so close to Him that before the sin is even admitted, before the temptation has reached the citadel of the will and becomes our own act, it is repelled at the entrance, and does not become our sin. He has promised to keep us as the apple of His eye, and, even as the eyelash is so constructed in the delicate organism of the human body that the very approach of the smallest particle of dust causes it instantly to close and repel the intruding substance, so the gentle Holy Ghost instinctively guards the heart and conscience from willful sin. There is something, however, even in the presence of temptation, and the surrounding atmosphere of a sin-defiled world, that spreads a certain contagion around us, like the air in the infected hospital. And it is necessary, therefore, that even this should be constantly cleansed, even as the falling showers wash away the dust from the pavements and the trees, and purify the summer air. This the Holy Spirit is constantly doing, and diffusing through the sanctified heart the freshness and sweetness of the heavenly atmosphere.

We find, therefore, in the Old Testament types, a beautiful provision for the cleansing of the people, even from the touch of the dead, through the water of separation. Num. xix. This beautiful ordinance was a type of the Holy Spirit applying to us the atonement of Christ, and cleansing us habitually from the very breath, and even the indirect contagion of surrounding evil. Even if our old, dead carnal nature touches us, or the atmosphere of sin is around us, we have constantly this water of separation, and the moment we are sprinkled with it every effect is removed and the spirit is quickened into freshness and sweetness, even as the waters that revive the famished earth, and cause the desert to blossom as the rose.

We must ever bear in mind, in tracing the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's heart, the distinction between purity of heart and maturity of character. From the moment that the soul is yielded to Christ in full surrender, and He is received as its divine and indwelling life, we have His purity, and the old, sinful self is reckoned dead, and in no sense recognized as our true self. There is a complete and eternal divorce, and the old heart is henceforth treated as if it were not, and Christ recognized as the true I, and, of course, a life that is essentially pure and divine. But, although wholly separated from the old, sinful life, is the new spirit yet in its infancy, and before it lie boundless stages of progress and development. The acorn is as complete in its parts as the oak of a thousand years, but not as fully developed. And so the soul which has just received Christ as its abiding life and sanctification, is as wholly sanctified, and as completely one with Him as Enoch or John is today, but not as mature. This is the meaning of Christian growth; we do not grow into holiness, we receive holiness in Christ as a complete, divine life; complete in all its parts from the beginning, and divine, as Christ is. But it is like the infant Christ on Mary's bosom, and it has to grow up into all the fullness of the stature of perfect manhood in Christ.

This is the work of the Holy Ghost, as the mother and the nurse, the teacher, educator, cherisher of our spiritual life, and it is in this connection that we must learn to walk in the Spirit, and rise with Him into "all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power," until we shall have reached the fullness of His own prayer for us. "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus Christ, great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever.

The Spirit Of Holiness

Amen."