

Lesson 9

The Work of the Spirit After Conversion

Introduction

The Spirit's dwelling in us is one of the greatest blessings God has reserved for His sons and daughters. The fanfare with which the Spirit came in Acts 2 must be something significant. Why does the Spirit live within us?

There are two main things the Spirit does for us: He gives us *knowledge* and He gives us *power*. The knowledge comes from the revealed and inspired Word, the Bible. The purpose of His indwelling then, is not to fill our brain with more knowledge, rather it is power. The Spirit gives two kinds of power.

First, he empowers individuals to serve God's purposes and to meet the needs of His people. But, He can do this for people without indwelling them. Secondly, it seems that the Spirit fills us with *moral power*, to strengthen our wills so that we may be able both to desire and to do what is right. The name given to this work is *sanctification*.

Sanctification is related to holiness and has to do with separation. The Old Testament word for "holy" comes from a word that means "to separate." Thus, a holy person or thing is one that is separated or set apart from others. In the New Testament, the word "holy" comes from a word that means "to set apart or consecrate, to sanctify." As we think of the Spirit's work, there are three main areas:

- Initial sanctification, a.k.a *positional sanctification*
- Progressive sanctification, a.k.a., *personal sanctification*
- Final sanctification, a.k.a., *ultimate sanctification*

Initial Sanctification

This is the one-time event in which the unsaved person joins the ranks of the saved, the moment he or she is set apart from the world, Galatians 1.4. It is a change of status or position in relation to God and in relation to the world. It is the formal transfer of the sinner from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of Christ, Colossians 1.13. It is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6.11 and Titus 3.5. Other passages include Acts 20.32; 26.18; Romans 15.16; 1 Corinthians 1.2; Hebrews 10.29. These passages are describing the objective status of every Christian, from the moment of conversion, as a result of *initial* sanctification. It is this moment we have been "set apart."

Progressive Sanctification

This is the ongoing process in which the Christian becomes more and more separated from sin itself. This is not an objective change in status or relationships, but a continuing transformation of our inward character and mental attitudes, as well as our outward behavior and conduct. The result of receiving a new heart and receiving the indwelling of the Spirit, Ezekiel 36.25-27, is that we are now able to walk in

God's statutes and observe His ordinances. We can relate this to Ephesians 2.10: *We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*. This is for the purpose of *good works*.

The following passages speak of progressive sanctification: 2 Peter 3.18; Philippians 2.12; Ephesians 4.22-24; 1 Peter 1.15-16; Matthew 5.48; Hebrews 12.10; 2 Peter 1.4. While the Spirit is working, we are working. We must work to purify ourselves, 1 John 3.3. We must *present our members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification*, Romans 6.19, 22. We must *cleanse ourselves of all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, 2 Corinthians 7.1. See also 1 Thessalonians 4.3, 7.

In 1 Thessalonians 5.23 Paul wrote, *now may the God of peace sanctify you entirely*. It is also seen in Hebrews 2.11, 10.14. We are the *ones being sanctified* and the *ones being made holy*.

Final Sanctification

To what does progressive sanctification lead? Ephesians 5.26-27; Colossians 1.22; Matthew 5.48; 1 Peter 1.16; and 1 John 3.3 speak of a time when we will be as perfect and holy as the Father and as pure as Jesus. This doesn't happen in this life, but after death. Hebrews 12.23 speaks of *the spirits of the righteous made perfect* and probably refers to Christians who have died and are awaiting the resurrection of their new bodies. These are the ones, says the Hebrews writer, who have been made perfect. The completion of the process is also seen in 1 Thessalonians 3.13. Here, we are told that when the Lord comes we will be presented having our hearts established *without blame in holiness before our God and Father*. This is when He will present the church to Himself *in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle*, Ephesians 5.27.

The Spirit as a Seal

The New Testament supplies us with vivid imagery regarding the Spirit's indwelling presence within Christians. Note these references:

- 2 Corinthians 1:21–22: *And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*
- 2 Corinthians 5:5: *He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*
- Ephesians 1:13–14: *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*
- Ephesians 4:30: *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

In ancient times, people placed a seal on a document or object in order to tie it legally to the owner of the seal. The seal itself was an image carved onto a stone that could be mounted into a signet ring. The act of sealing involved pressing the image into soft clay or wax, which was attached to the document in order to be "sealed." Modern counterparts include a branding iron, a notary public's official stamp, a copyright, and even a person's signature. The seal often guaranteed authenticity or legal validity, similar

to a signature on a check or document. A seal could also function as a simple mark of ownership, as when a rancher brands a calf to say, “this one is mine.”

In 2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; and Ephesians 1.14 the Spirit is described as a pledge. This word in Greek is a business term that refers to earnest money or down payment that serves as a guarantee for the purchaser’s intention of paying the full amount. It is the first installment, to be followed by full payment.

Both of these concepts apply to the Holy Spirit in that when God saves us He makes us a part of His family and guarantees that we will one day share in the full inheritance of eternal glory, Romans 8.14-17; Galatians 4.1-7. That we are *sealed* with the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit within us is a *mark of ownership* identifying us as a true member of God’s family. As a pledge, the Spirit is the down payment of “earnest money,” giving us the assurance of eternal life. Being *partakers of the Holy Spirit*, we have tasted *the powers of the age to come*, Hebrews 6.4-5. This inheritance not only includes being in the new heavens and new earth, not just the resurrected body. But, above all else - *final sanctification*, which is the most satisfying gift of our redemption. One day we will be completely free from sin and temptation . . . absolutely perfect in the eyes of God.

Romans 8:23 adds a third image to the mix; here the Spirit is described as “the first fruits,” guaranteeing “the redemption of our body” (see Rom 8:11), which will be the climactic event of our final sanctification.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What are the two main things the Spirit does for us after our initial salvation?
2. What is *sanctification*?
3. Define *initial sanctification*.
4. Define *progressive sanctification*.
5. Define *final sanctification*.

6. Why do you think Paul so often stressed *the guarantee* regarding our salvation?

7. During ancient times, what was the significance of a seal?

8. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a *pledge*?

9. What is included in our *inheritance*?