

# Sons Of God

by

*J. I. Packer*

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Third, *our adoption gives us the key to understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit.*

Pitfalls and perplexities regarding the ministry of the Spirit abound among Christians today. The problem is not in finding correct verbal labels, but in knowing what it is in experience that corresponds to the work of God to which the labels refer. Thus, we are all aware that the Spirit teaches the mind of God, and glorifies the Son of God, out of the scriptures; also, that He is the agent of new birth, giving us an understanding so that we know God and a new heart to obey Him; also, that He indwells, sanctifies, and energises Christians for their daily pilgrimage; also, that assurance, joy, peace, and power are His special gifts. But many complain in puzzlement that these statements are to them mere formulae, not corresponding with anything they recognize in their own lives. Naturally, such Christians feel they are missing something vital, and ask anxiously how they may close the gap between the New Testament picture of life in the Spirit and their own felt barrenness in daily experience. Then, perhaps, in desperation they set themselves to seek a single transforming psychic event whereby what they feel to be their personal 'unspirituality barrier' may be broken for good and all. The event may be thought of as the 'Keswick experience', or 'full surrender', or 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', or 'entire sanctification', or 'sealing with the Spirit', or the gift of tongues, or (if we steer by Catholic rather than Protestant stars) a 'second conversion', or the prayer of quiet, or of union. Yet even if something happens which they feel able to identify with what they were looking for, they soon find that the 'unspirituality barrier' has not been broken after all, and so move on restlessly to something new. Many are caught in these toils today. What help is needed here? we ask. The light shed by the truth of adoption on the ministry of the Spirit gives the answer.

The cause of such troubles as we have described is a false, magical type of supernaturalism, which leads people to hanker after a transforming touch as from an electric impersonal power that will make them feel wholly free from the burdens and bondages of living with themselves and other people. They believe that this is the essence of genuine spiritual

experience. They think the work of the Spirit is to give them experiences that are like LSD trips. (How unhelpful it is when evangelists actually promise this, and when drugtakers equate their fantasies with religious experience! Will our age never learn to distinguish things that differ?) In fact, however, this quest for an inward explosion rather than an inward communion shows deep misunderstanding of the Spirit's ministry. For the vital truth to be grasped here is that the Spirit is given to Christians as 'the Spirit of adoption', and in all His ministry to Christians He acts as the Spirit of adoption. As such, His task and purpose throughout is to make Christians realize with increasing clarity the meaning of their filial relationship with God in Christ, and to lead them into an ever deeper response to God in this relationship. Paul is pointing to this truth when he writes, 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father' (Romans 8:15). 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying'—that is, prompting you to cry—'Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6). Just as adoption itself is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for unifying, the New Testament view of the Christian life, so a recognition that the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of adoption is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for integrating, all that the New Testament tells us about His ministry to Christians.

From the standpoint provided by this focal thought, we see that His work has three aspects. In the first place, He makes and keeps us conscious—sometimes vividly conscious, always conscious—to some extent, even when the perverse part of us prompts us to deny this consciousness—that we are God's children by free grace through Jesus Christ. This is His work of giving faith, assurance, and joy. In the second place, He moves us to look to God as to a father, showing towards Him the respectful boldness and unlimited trust that is natural to children secure in an adored father's love. This is His work of making us cry 'Abba, Father'—the attitude described is what the cry expresses. In the third place, He impels us to act up to our position as royal children by manifesting the family likeness (*i.e.* conforming to Christ), furthering the family welfare (*i.e.* loving the brethren), and maintaining the family honour (*i.e.*

seeking God's glory). This is His work of sanctification. Through this progressive deepening of filial consciousness and character, with its outworking in the pursuit of what God loves and the avoidance of what He hates, 'we are transformed by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendour into His own image' (2 Corinthians 3:18, Phillips). So it is not as we strain after feelings and

experiences, of whatever sort, but as we seek God Himself, looking to Him as our Father, prizing His fellowship, and finding in ourselves an increasing concern to know and please Him, that the reality of the Spirit's ministry becomes visible in our lives. This is the needed truth which can lift us out of the quagmire of non-spiritual views of the Spirit in which so many today are floundering.

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## Paraclete

by

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### THE HOLY SPIRIT MINISTERS TO BELIEVERS

*When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*

JOHN 16:13-14

Before Jesus' passion, he promised that the Father and he would send his disciples "another Counselor" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Counselor or Paraclete, from the Greek word *parakletos* (meaning one who gives support), is a helper, adviser, strengthener, encourager, ally, and advocate. *Another* points to the fact that Jesus was the first Paraclete and is promising a replacement who, after he is gone, will carry on the teaching and testimony that he started (John 16:6-7).

Paraclete ministry, by its very nature, is personal, relational ministry, implying the full personhood of the one who fulfills it. Though the Old Testament said much about the Spirit's activity in Creation (e.g., Gen 1:2; Ps. 33:6), revelation (e.g., Isa. 61:1-6; Mic. 3:8), enabling for service (e.g., Exod. 31:2-6; Judg. 6:34; 15:14-15; Isa. 11:2), and inward renewal (e.g., Ps. 51:10-12; Ezek. 36:25-27), it did not make clear that the Spirit is a distinct divine Person. In the New Testament, however, it becomes clear that the Spirit is as truly a Person distinct from the Father as the Son is. This is apparent not only from Jesus' promise of "another Counselor," but also from the fact that the

Spirit, among other things, speaks (Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 28:25), teaches (John 14:26), witnesses (John 15:26), searches (1 Cor. 2:11), determines (1 Cor. 12:11), intercedes (Rom. 8:26-27), is lied to (Acts 5:3), and can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). Only of a personal being can such things be said.

The divinity of the Spirit appears from the declaration that lying to the Spirit is lying to God (Acts 5:3-4), and from the linking of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in benedictions (2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-6) and in the formula of baptism (Matt. 28:19). The Spirit is called "the seven spirits" in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 partly, it seems, because *seven* is a number signifying divine perfection and partly because the Spirit ministers in his fullness.

The Spirit, then, is "he," not "it," and he must be obeyed, loved, and adored along with the Father and the Son.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ, glorifying him by showing his disciples who and what he is (John 16:7-15), and making them aware of what they are in him (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6) is the Paraclete's central

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ministry. The Spirit enlightens us (Eph. 1:17-18), regenerates us (John 3:5-8), leads us into holiness (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-18), transforms us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23), gives us assurance (Rom. 8:16), and gifts us for ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-11). All God's work in us, touching our hearts, our characters, and our conduct, is done by the Spirit, though aspects of it are sometimes ascribed to the Father and the Son, whose executive the Spirit is.

The Spirit's full Paraclete ministry began on Pentecost morning, following Jesus' ascension (Acts 2:1-4). John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptize in the Spirit (Mark 1:8; John 1:33), according to the Old Testament promise of an outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Jer. 31:31-34), and Jesus had repeated the promise (Acts 1:4-5). The significance of Pentecost morning was twofold: it marked the opening of the final era of

world history before Christ's return, and, as compared with the Old Testament era, it marked a tremendous enhancing of the Spirit's ministry and of the experience of being alive to God.

Jesus disciples were evidently Spirit-born believers prior to Pentecost, so their Spirit-baptism, which brought power to their life and ministry (Acts 1:8), was not the start of their spiritual experience. For all who have come to faith since Pentecost morning, however, beginning with the Pentecost converts themselves, the receiving of the Spirit in full new-covenant blessing has been one aspect of their conversion and new birth (Acts 2:37; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). All capacities for service that subsequently appear in a Christian's life should be seen as flowing from this initial Spirit-baptism, which vitally unites the sinner to the risen Christ.

## Sanctification

by

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### THE CHRISTIAN GROWS IN GRACE

*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? . . . And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9, 11

Sanctification, says the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35), is "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." The concept is not of sin being totally eradicated (that is to claim too much) or merely counteracted (that is to say too little), but of a divinely wrought character change freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues.

Sanctification is an ongoing transformation within a maintained consecration, and it engenders real righteousness within the frame of relational holiness. Relational sanctification, the state of being permanently set apart for God, flows from the cross,

where God through Christ purchased and claimed us for himself (Acts 20:28; 26:18, Heb. 10:10). Moral renovation, whereby we are increasingly changed from what we once were, flows from the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21). God calls his children to sanctity and graciously gives what he commands (1 Thess. 4:4; 5:23).

Regeneration is birth; sanctification is growth. In regeneration, God implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for the hallowing and glorifying of God's name in this world; desire to pray, worship, love, serve, honor, and please God; desire to show love and bring benefit

to others. In sanctification, the Holy Spirit “works in you to will and to act” according to God’s purpose; what he does is prompt you to “work out your salvation” (i.e., express it in action) by fulfilling these new desires (Phil. 2:12-13). Christians become increasingly Christlike as the moral profile of Jesus (the “fruit of the Spirit”) is progressively formed in them (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; 5:22-25). Paul’s use of *glory* in 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows that for him sanctification of character is glorification begun. Then the physical transformation that gives us a body like Christ’s, one that will match our totally transformed character and be a perfect means of expressing it, will be glorification completed (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:49-53).

Regeneration was a momentary monergistic act of quickening the spiritually dead. As such, it was God’s work alone. Sanctification, however, is in one sense synergistic—it is an ongoing cooperative process in which regenerate persons, alive to God and freed from sin’s dominion (Rom. 6:11, 14-18), are required to exert themselves in sustained obedience. God’s method of sanctification is neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but God-dependent effort (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 3:10-14; Heb. 12:14). Knowing that without Christ’s enabling we can do nothing, morally speaking, as we should, and that he is ready to strengthen us for all that we have to do (Phil. 4:13), we “stay put” (remain, abide) in Christ, asking for his help constantly—and we receive it (Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2:1).

The standard to which God’s work of sanctifying his saints is directed is his own revealed moral law, as expounded and modeled by Christ himself. Christ’s love, humility, and patience under pressure are to be consciously imitated (Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:21), for a Christlike spirit and attitude are part of what law-keeping involves.

Believers find within themselves contrary urgings. The Spirit sustains their regenerate desires and purposes; their fallen, Adamic instincts (the “flesh”) which, though dethroned, are not yet destroyed, constantly distract them from doing God’s will and allure them along paths that lead to death (Gal. 5:16-17; James 1:14-15). To clarify the relationship between the law and sin, Paul analyzes in a personal and dramatic way the sense of impotence for complete law-keeping, and the enslavement to behavior one dislikes, that the Spirit-flesh tension produces (Rom. 7:14-25). This conflict and frustration will be with Christians as long as they are in the body. Yet by watching and praying against temptation, and cultivating opposite virtues, they may through the Spirit’s help “mortify” (i.e., drain the life out of, weaken as a means of killing) particular bad habits, and in that sense more and more die unto sin (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). They will experience many particular deliverances and victories in their unending battle with sin, while never being exposed to temptations that are impossible to resist (1 Cor. 10:13).