

The Work of the Holy Spirit
in Making us Sensible to the Manifold Evils of Sin
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In a recent Gospel presentation before a crowd of mostly teenagers, a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers, a young, well meaning, but misguided pastor told the group that they were “important to God” and that they ought to “give him a chance.”

In another venue, a discussion group, comprised mostly of unbelievers, we were discussing the matter of overcoming temptation. Some in the group had a Christian background and were acquainted with religious jargon. In the course of give and take exchange, I fielded that unholy triad of (1) “You’ve got to find God within yourself.” (2) “You have to love yourself;” and (3) “You have to forgive yourself.”

This is typical contemporary Evangelical parlance. Noticeably absent is any mention of real moral guilt, the necessity of repentance and other essentials of the Gospel such as those relating to the character of God and the nature of the atonement. It is a reductionist message of how to get to heaven as opposed to how sinful man can be reconciled to a holy God.

Gospel preaching, in too many instances, has devolved to something not unlike a sales pitch whereby one clinches the deal with an appeal to pray a prayer, thereby, presumably, giving God a chance. As wet is to a fish, this man-centered approach to Gospel proclamation is so commonplace that it goes largely undetected and is not infrequently identified as “orthodoxy.” The pastoral implications of this approach are enormous.

In addition to this “new methods message” we should observe an important movement of the latter twentieth century, known as the charismatic movement. It crested (in America, at least) in 1978 with an event that nearly filled the New Jersey Meadowlands, Giants’ Stadium. It was billed as the greatest ecumenical gathering in the history of the church with speakers ranging from Jim Bakker to Richard Cardinal Cooke. In one of the greatest of historical ironies, a large segment of the church, having been under the influence of this movement, directly or indirectly, emerged from it, supposedly with a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit, with hardly a noticeable increase in understanding His most important work, that of making us sensible to the manifold evils of sin (Savoy XV.III). Such talk was deemed negative, morose and defeatist whereas new experiences of the Holy Spirit breathed the fresh air of a more positive, joy-producing, and, thus, a more victorious Christian life.

Granted the validity of some of its criticisms of the mid-twentieth-century church, can we affirm a new emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit without a substantive discussion of the comprehensive scope of His work?¹ With the foregoing in mind, the focus of this study is significantly narrowed to repentance and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Antecedent to the subject before us is some discussion of the human condition, that is, the extent of the effects of sin on Adam’s posterity and the nature of God with a particular emphasis on His holiness and His response to sin and rebellion along with His love that purposed to send His Son to redeem a portion of humanity.

Our intention thereby is to place the work of the Holy Spirit within a Trinitarian context, so necessary in today’s climate where the Holy Spirit is too often perceived as

¹ A.W. Pink, The Holy Spirit, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1970). Note his table of contents (listed here, in part): “The Holy Spirit Regenerating, The Spirit Quickening, Enlightening, Convicting, Comforting, Drawing, Working Faith, Uniting to Christ, Indwelling, Teaching, Cleansing, . . . , etc.

the third leg in a historical redemptive relay, taking over where the Father and Son left off.

The Human Condition

We intend to briefly show in this section the nature of sin and its radical and far reaching effects on man. This will help us appreciate the necessity of the convicting and vivifying work of the Holy Spirit.

We begin with the question, what is the human condition that requires an awakening? What are these “manifold evils of sin” to which we are to be awakened? What is this thing called evil, the existence of which is painfully acknowledged by the vast majority of the human race. Is it the unfortunate result of some accidental, malevolent artifact injected into the evolutionary stream? Is it, in the words of Steven Spielberg, “a learned behavior?”

Is the human condition a matter of ignorance to be removed by an infusion of information? Is it stubbornness to be overcome by techniques of suasion and persuasion designed to induce the belligerent into making the right choices?

Is it privation as the Roman Catholic church holds? In this view the Roman church basically follows Aquinas. In Adam’s original state, the body left to itself, would be subject to moral decay. It needs to be restrained and governed by the soul, subdued by reason, which, in turn, is submissive to God. This is accomplished by God bestowing a super added gift on Adam. As long as this gift of grace was there, Adam would remain in a state of innocence and the body would not be subject to decay. “His [Adam’s] soul was equipped by God with a supernatural force capable of preserving the body from all decay, as long as it remained submissive to God itself.”² The effect of the Fall was the withdrawal of this superadded gift. The image of God remains albeit in a weakened as opposed to a depraved condition. “It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice but human nature has not been totally corrupted.”³

We cannot understand the problem of evil (the human condition) without considering that historical event found in Genesis chapter 3. There we observe Adam⁴ assuming a position of autonomy in which he contumaciously takes on the role of arbitrator between God and Satan. He will adjudicate between the two and decide for himself what is true. This is wholesale rebellion, a violation of the Creator-creature relationship.

The question now must be asked, to what extent was Adam and his posterity affected by the Fall? We notice first, a disposition in Adam to hide from God—shame and suppression of the truth (cf. Romans 1:18). In the story of Cain and Abel, the effects of sin are observed in the disposition of the heart that each brought to their worship of God. Abel offered a more perfect sacrifice inasmuch as it was offered with a heart and gift dedicated to God. The elaborate but otherwise perfunctory sacrifice of Cain, offered as an appeasement to God, yielded His rejection. Cain was angry and refused to be

² *Summa Theologica*, Ia.95.6, 97.2-3.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, English Translation), par. 405.

⁴ The Genesis account gives us Eve as being the one who actually engaged in dialogue with the serpent. Nevertheless it is Adam who bears the first order of responsibility and it is in him we all died.

corrected. This generated an animosity that was consummated in Cain's murder of his brother. In the subsequent progression of human events, violence was amplified with Lamech settling a dispute with murder and bragging about it.

In the Flood story we are awakened further to the radical nature of the effects of sin. Every thought and inclination of man's heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5; 8:21). In the plains of Shinar we learn that sin would dethrone God were it possible to do so (Genesis 11:4).

The Scriptures do not know of a superadded gift in Adam's original righteousness. It does assert that he was created in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 3:24) and in true knowledge (Colossians 3:10). The Fall affected Adam in the totality of His being. There was no part of him unaffected by sin.

The New Testament is less restrained about the effects of sin on the heart. The heart, Biblically speaking, is what constitutes a person as he truly is. "*As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man*" (Proverbs 27:19). We read in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Our Lord asserts here that the heart is totally corrupt. If that is the description of all of humanity from conception (cf. Psalm 51:5), then, left to ourselves, we are hopelessly bound in trespasses and sin. Our problem is not metaphysical; it is not our finitude; it is moral. We are born with a disposition that resists God. There are many other Scriptures that could be cited to demonstrate that the effects of original sin run deep within the soul, thus rendering us incapable of coming to God on our own initiative.⁵

The problem for fallen humanity is that his lost condition is not primarily one of ignorance, though ignorance certainly plays a role. Nor is it one of stubbornness whereby persuasive techniques, not unrelated to salesmanship, are martialed against the unbeliever in the hopes of obtaining a "decision." This position erroneously holds that grace extends equally to all; therefore what remains is for the sinner to decide for Christ. We have shown above that the human condition is that man is dead—very much alive to the world's system—but dead, unresponsive to the things of God.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Having briefly examined the Biblical teaching regarding original sin and its effects on Adam's posterity, we must also consider the important matter of the holiness of God. Without the latter, original sin is irrelevant. The holiness of God is pertinent to our discussion of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ John 8:34; Romans 1:18; 8:7; I Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:1-3.

The Holiness of God

Considered by itself the holiness of God is a circular argument. What is the nature of God? He is holy. What is holiness with respect to God? It is what God is.

The holiness of God bespeaks His uniqueness such that no person, no idea, nor any created being or thing can be compared to Him and thereby do justice to the representation of Him.

Particularly relevant to our subject is that the holiness of God is also about His moral perfection and purity and thereby it becomes the basis by which He commands obedience and repentance. Many are the commands in the Pentateuch and the Prophets that end with the phrase, "*I am the Lord.*" Consider the incident of the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20) where Moses was commanded to speak to the rock. In a fit of temper he struck the rock and water came out, yet it cost Moses dearly. He was forbidden to enter the promised land for his failure to regard God as holy. "And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them'" (Numbers 20:12).

There are two incidents in the story of the return of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, who had previously captured it in battle but were anxious to return it as its presence among them proved to be an embarrassment to their god, Dagon, and also a curse (I Samuel 5-6). The first of these occurred when the men of Beth Shemesh, who had first spotted the ark on its return, dared to look inside it. Unholy men, acting in too familiar a manner and without divine sanction, dared to pass, so to speak, the angelic sentry with the flaming sword. They were struck dead (I Samuel 6:19). The men of Beth Shemesh were quite right in asking the question, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?" (6:20).

In a later incident, when the ark was being transported to its proper resting place, in an unwitting violation of divine protocol, Uzzah was nevertheless struck dead as he put out his hand to steady the ark as it was improperly being carried by ox cart.

And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God (II Samuel 6:6-7).

The Psalmist rightly asserts, "Evil may not dwell with you" (Psalm 5:4) and subsequently asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psalm 24:3). Who indeed? but our Lord who has gone before us.

We cannot overlook that poignant, indeed terrifying experience of Isaiah in his vision of the heavenly throne. He observed the seraphim calling out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). Then "the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke" (6:4). Isaiah's knee buckling response is as follows, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (6:5). Isaiah's sinfulness in the face God's holiness caused him to see himself as a condemned man ("Woe is me.").

Even the priests, who were authorized to perform the daily offices in the presence of the Lord, had to leave the Temple when the cloud, signifying the presence of God, filled the house of the Lord. “The priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (I Kings 8:10-11).

The holiness of God extends to His wrath. He stands resolutely opposed to sin in all its forms. The character of sin, as has been previously noted, left unchecked, is such that it would dethrone God, were it possible to do so. There comes a point when God unleashes His fury in the winepress of His wrath (Revelation 19:15). In the book of Revelation, when the bowls of God’s wrath are poured out, not even the four living creatures (presumably) could be in His presence. “The sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished” (Revelation 15:8).

From the foregoing we draw several conclusions: (1) Man is hopelessly and helplessly bound in sin. The ravages of sin have affected and infected every part of man’s nature including his will.⁶ (2) The holiness of God is such that no moral imperfection can be in His presence. Moreover, the holiness of God demands moral perfection and holds those made in His image responsible for failing to attain it.

God shows Himself to be holy in His justice and righteousness. “But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16). Revelation 16:5 speaks of the justice of God in pouring out His wrath on sinful humanity, “And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, ‘Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.’”

We may infer from the foregoing that (3) His holiness commands repentance.

God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts (Psalm 7:11-13).

In Paul’s address to the Stoics and Epicureans on the Areopagus he urges them to repent of their wrong ideas about God. He states,

the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Here is the dilemma for man. God is holy and he cannot abide sinners in His presence. Man is dead in trespasses and sin. God holds him responsible for his actions and commands obedience. “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Romans 8:7). How is this dilemma resolved? Needless to say, the answer to this question has profound implications both pastorally and in our evangelistic endeavors.

We answer briefly, in order to proceed to the main subject of this discourse, that the dilemma is answered in the person and work of Christ. The holy and just God is the

⁶ See Douglas Vickers, *Divine Redemption and the Refuge of Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2005), chapter 4, “The Status of the Will and States of Human Consciousness,” pp. 74-105.

justifier of sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” (Romans 3:25). This propitiation pertains to the holiness of God inasmuch as divine justice has been satisfied in the death of His Son who was offered as a substitute for sinners.

The problem remains, however, how can sinners, hopelessly and helplessly bound in sin, meet the demands of a holy and righteous God? How does the work of Christ reach the sinner? How can man repent seeing that, left to himself, he prefers some one or something else to God? The answer is found in the convicting and vivifying work of the Holy Spirit.

“This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person being by the Holy Ghost made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, does by faith in Christ humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-aborrancy, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose, and endeavor by supplies of the spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things” (Savoy, XV.iii.).

To understand this evangelical grace making us sensitive to the manifold evils of sin, we turn to our Lord's teaching on the Holy Spirit in John 16:8-11. “When He comes, He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment” (16:8). Following this text, we will consider the convicting work of the Holy Spirit under the headings, sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The Holy Spirit Convicts of Sin

The word, ἐπιλέγει, from which we get the English word, *elenctic*, the art of refutation, translates into English as *convict*. It is a comprehensive activity carrying the idea of exposing, bringing to light, or convincing but with a view to setting things right, to point away from sin and a summons to repentance.⁷ He convicts the world, that is, sinful humanity, of sin.

The reaction to Peter's sermon on Pentecost, illustrates this quite dramatically: “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). Their response was prompted by Peter's very direct accusation, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus **whom you crucified**” (2:36) [emphasis mine].

The Spirit convicts of sin because, in the words of our Lord, “they do not believe in Me” (John 16:9). The ultimate in unbelief is refusal to believe in Jesus, the Christ, the One promised in the Garden after the Fall, the descendent of Abraham who would bless all the families of the earth, the Prophet whom we must obey, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant. In other words, the Spirit not only convicts of sin(s) particular, but also of a disposition that refuses to accept God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures inasmuch as it is primarily about Christ and the story of redemption. The person and

⁷ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964), vol. II, p. 474.

work of Christ is the first order of Biblical hermeneutics.⁸ “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:1-2 cf. also John 1:1-5). Thus, to refuse Him is to refuse God’s authority who speaks through His inspired-by-the-Holy Spirit Scriptures.

Moreover, Christ came to deal with the problem of sin and that is what people refuse to acknowledge. Thus, they reject Him. There is a connection between believing in Jesus and acknowledging our sin. That is the very reason He came, to save from sin that is so ingrained that we are enslaved by it. Those who opposed Jesus would not acknowledge their sin. Indeed, they saw themselves as righteous and Jesus as the sinner. Granted, they would acknowledge some moral defect but it was nothing that could not be overcome by righteous acts as they defined them.

People do not come to Christ because in so doing their sins, along with the condition of their hearts, would be exposed. “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19-20). We are reminded of the action of our first parents after they had sinned, and God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. They ran and hid among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

The world would never acknowledge its sin were it not for the convicting work of the Spirit. It has some sense of moral rectitude but its standard is fluid, always changing. If one has wronged another, there is always a “good reason” for doing so. Speaking of his adulterous affair, the man commented, “She drove me to it.” Our contemporary world is infuriated at the thought of real moral guilt before a holy and righteous God. Indeed, orthodox Christians are the sinners who would “misinterpret” Jesus by denying His “inclusivism.”

The Holy Spirit Convicts of Righteousness

The Holy Spirit convicts of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Sin is what we should not do, righteousness is what we should do. Righteousness, as it applies to man, has to do with right conduct in conformity with the will of God. Simply put, righteousness is doing the will of God. Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. At His baptism He demonstrates His commitment to obey the Father in all things. His was a life of “obedience unto death.”

In justification, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us but righteousness with respect to believers is an imperative as well as an indicative. We ask. Is it really the case that after the Fall, God dropped His demands on mankind for complete obedience? Does He not command obedience and covenant faithfulness in those whom He has redeemed? Has he abandoned all expectations of Adam in his prelapsarian state? We answer that the law is still in force because it is the very expression of the character of God which is unchangeable. We state further that we are saved *to* something as well as *from*

⁸ In a simplified schema of proper Biblical interpretation, I rank them as follows: (1) the person and work of Christ, (2) Scripture interprets Scripture, (3) the historical-grammatical meaning. This is a hierarchy but they are all organically connected.

something? The Apostle Peter states, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, [i.e. purpose] that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (I Peter 2:24).

We are, indeed, saved from sin, death and the devil. We are saved to live a righteous life. How does this happen? It happens by the work of the Holy Spirit convicting us of righteousness. How does He convict us of righteousness?

He is the Spirit of truth. In the economy of the Trinity, here is yet another place where the Holy Spirit’s work intersects with that of Christ’s who *is* the truth. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ who is in heaven. Our Lord, speaking of the Holy Spirit, says in John 14:18,20; “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

As the Spirit of truth, He comes from the Father and the Son and “He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I [Christ] have said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself but rather He speaks what He hears from the Father and the Son,

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-14).

In other words, to convict of righteousness is another way of saying that He will guide you into all truth (John 16:13). What is this *all the truth* into which the Holy Spirit guides us? It is whatever the Father had planned in creation and redemption. It is whatever the Son has carried out in creation and redemption.

We need an absolute standard of truth if we are to live the life to which we have been called. That objective standard is the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures. We also need the subjective engagement of our lives with those Scriptures. As doers of the Word we need the Holy Spirit to convict us of righteousness. There are things to do in the Christian life and this doing by means of the Holy Spirit’s convicting of righteousness, comprehends the totality of our lives.

We can understand that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin “because they [the world] do not believe in Me, but less clear is the appositional phrase to convicting of righteousness “because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer” (John 16:10). What then, we ask, is the relationship between convicting of righteousness and going to the Father, that is, going away to where His disciples can no longer see Him physically?

Though the Holy Spirit’s work in creation and redemption has been there throughout (Genesis 1:2; Numbers 27:18; Acts 7:51; I Peter 1:10-11), we note that He is not, indeed, He cannot, be fully revealed until after Christ ascends into heaven. After the resurrection Jesus ascends to the Father to where He is enthroned to reign as king forever (Psalm 110:1). Now He is gone, away from His disciples—what to do? He said He would return to them. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). The answer is in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We have already noted that in the economy of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit does not act on His own but rather His primary function is to point to the person and work of Christ, who, in turn, came to carry out the will of the Father. In the chronology of events

in the unfolding story of redemption, the Holy Spirit could not come until Christ had finished the work the Father sent Him to do for the reason just stated. By His coming we understand two things: (1) It is a more complete and comprehensive revealing of His person and work. (2) The coming of the Holy Spirit is the way our risen Lord can still be with His people though He is actually removed from them, seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

What then is this relationship between convicting of righteousness and Christ's ascension? Note that Christ is now enthroned in heaven. He is reigning now. Of the increase of His government there will be no end. His kingdom is advancing as we speak. The relationship is simply this; our Lord goes to the Father. His kingdom is inaugurated. The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Church at Pentecost empowering His people to advance His kingdom with weapons that are not carnal (II Corinthians 10:4). That kingdom is characterized by "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

We are to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness as our highest priority (Matthew 6:33). Of the various ways the Holy Spirit empowers us toward that end is that He convicts of righteousness. He reminds us that it is not our righteousness (Philippians 3:9; Titus 3:5) but it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Romans 4:23). He instructs us in the righteousness of the kingdom, ". . . that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4b). The obedience that God demanded of Adam will now be realized in His redeemed people who walk in the Spirit albeit imperfectly. Yet, because of the Spirit, that primal obedience will most surely be fulfilled when the saints are glorified. This is what they are longing for while in this life (Romans 8:23, 30).

The Holy Spirit Convicts of Judgment

The Holy Spirit convicts "concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:11). The judgment [κρίσις] spoken of here refers first and foremost to Satan. His power was broken at the Cross. "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). We observe the same thing in Revelation 12. At the beginning of the 1260 days, the inter-advent period, Satan and his cohorts were thrown down to the earth. "The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Revelation 12:9).

The Holy Spirit reminds of judgment. This is both a warning of the wrath to come and a vindication of the saints suffering at the hands of their persecutors. Satan is active but unable to halt the advance of the kingdom. He will be ultimately cast into the lake of fire (20:10). The Holy Spirit warns those who would remain his followers that they will also be cast into the lake of fire (20:15).

The Holy Spirit speaks the meaning of the cross to the world. It is either the offer of life in the Son, or a warning of judgment that is sure to come.

The Holy Spirit and Regeneration

We return to the earlier question regarding man's dilemma. How can a holy God bring into fellowship one who is so unholy with a disposition that is predisposed to resist

God at every turn, while at the same time holding man responsible for his actions thereby condemning him to death?

The answer lies in the person and work of Christ who in His death on the cross satisfied divine justice and redeems a portion of humanity. The soteriological issues involved are beyond the scope of this study. To briefly summarize His salvific work we cite the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53,

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6).

and the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Here we see the principle of substitution, one dying for the sins of another. But how is this work of redemption, accomplished in history, applied?

Sinful man cannot save himself. There must be a supernatural transformation that changes the heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26) that brings one from death to life (Ephesians 2:1-5). Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Earlier John described those who were given the right to be called "sons of God" (John 1:12) that they "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:13).

It is a transformation that is wrought by the Holy Spirit. Jesus explains to a very perplexed Nicodemus, that it is a sovereign work of the Spirit, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8).

We apply to the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus to discover the objective work of Christ and the subjective work of the Holy Spirit brought together,

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:4-6).

From the foregoing we learn that there must be an inner transformation of the heart, that is, a washing and a renewing, without which there can be no true repentance whereby "the sinner is made sensible to the manifold evils of his sin." The basis of this work is, of course, the work of Christ. It is the risen and ascended Christ who pours out the Holy Spirit who brings new life to the sinner.

Repentance is, indeed, an evangelical grace. By this we mean that it is part and parcel of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. How can it be otherwise given the disposition of our sinful nature? It is the effect of a Holy Spirit awakened sensibility to sin yielding a sorrow that produces a change in life. It is [μετανοία] a change of mind that leads to a change in life, as opposed to [μεταμέλλομαι] remorse, sorrow after the fact. Peter repented. Judas was remorseful (Matthew 27:3). Judas' sorrow led him to the self-atoning act of suicide. Peter's remorse led him back to Christ to be restored by Him

(John 21:15-19). Peter's repentance was demonstrated in reaffirming his love for Jesus. Thus, it can be said that repentance involves loving what God loves and hating what He hates (Romans 12:9). St. Augustine states it in a slightly different way, "No one can perfectly love that *to* which we are called unless he hate that *from* which we are called."

The dilemma is resolved. A propitiatory sacrifice has been provided which satisfies divine justice. Salvation is freely offered to all. Those who are ordained to eternal life, believe (Acts 13:48). This believing is wrought by the Holy Spirit convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment together with His inner work of washing and renewing. It is a co-operative work of Christ and the Spirit, as described by Edwards, "So the saints are said to live by Christ living in them, (Galatians 2:20). Christ by His Spirit not only *is* in them, but *lives* in them; they live by His life. His Spirit is united to them as a principle of life in them"⁹ [emphasis his].

The Pastoral and Evangelistic Implications of the Spirit's Work

In certain Bible study venues, we have asked the question from time to time, "Biblically speaking when is someone truly born again by the Spirit of God?" The answers are many and varied. They are typically man-centered, usually something to the effect when some overt commitment is made to receive Christ. Ironically, even those who are Evangelical Arminians will agree that many who have "prayed the prayer" in the past are following the devil today. Biblically speaking, one is born again at the moment of regeneration.

We must be clear about the holiness of God and the bondage of sin on every faculty of man's being. We must also be clear in our minds that one is not born again until regeneration in the heart takes place. The problem is that we cannot observe the actual moment of regeneration.

How then can we ever take anyone into church membership seeing that we cannot, humanly speaking, be sure that regeneration has occurred?

We must follow the Great Commission at this point.

- Make disciples. This involves preaching, teaching, one on one engagements, group Bible studies, etc. At some point, some determination must be made about their commitment to Christ. After all we must call people to repentance and faith. It is not wrong to ask someone to pray a prayer of commitment but we must not make anything more of it than it is—a prayer. Time will tell whether the person is serious about following Christ. This is where the church comes in.
- Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Speaking of adult converts, we baptize those with a credible confession of faith, a reasonable understanding of the Gospel, all in the judgment of charity, and we look for a reasonable demonstration of that faith by the way they live. This brings them into the visible church. With children baptized in infancy, we encourage their parents to teach them the implications of their baptism and to live out their baptism.
- In the church we teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. The implications of following Christ are not always obvious to a new

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, Select Works of Jonathan Edwards: The Religious Affections, vol. III, (Carlsisle, PA, Banner of Truth, 1961), p. 128.

believer. This is overcome by teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God, faithful to the Scriptures and to the faith once delivered to the saints.

Since we cannot humanly observe whether true conversion has taken place, we are convinced that this is the God ordained means of determining that as much as is humanly possible.

It is sad to note that the church will always be a mixed company. Generally speaking the true believers will continue on, those who are not, won't. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" (I John 2:19).

Repentance is an evangelical grace wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is inseparable from faith which apprehends the work of Christ. Such people transformed by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ are to be brought into the church which nurtures and cares for them under the rubric and discipline of the Word of God. Time will tell whose are His.