

The Holy Spirit's Work in Salvation



ARTHUR W. PINK (1886-1952)

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Each section in this booklet is taken from a related chapter in the book, *The Holy Spirit*, as follows:

1. The Work of the Holy Spirit from chapter 9
2. The Spirit Regenerating from chapter 10
3. The Spirit Quickening from chapter 11
4. The Spirit Enlightening from chapter 12
5. The Spirit Convicting from chapter 13
6. The Spirit Comforting from chapter 14
7. The Spirit Drawing from chapter 15
8. The Spirit Working Faith from chapter 16

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The Holy Spirit's Work in Salvation

1. The Work of the Holy Spirit

We shall consider His special and saving work in the people of God, dwelling mainly upon the absolute necessity for the same. It should make it easier for the Christian reader to perceive the absoluteness of this necessity, when we say that the whole work of the Spirit within the elect is to plant in the heart a hatred for and a loathing of *sin as sin*, and a love for and longing after *holiness as holiness*.

This is something that no human power can bring about. It is something that the most faithful preaching as such cannot produce. It is something that the mere circulating and reading of the Scripture does not impart. It is a miracle of *grace*, a divine wonder, which none but God can or does perform.

Total Depravity Apart from the Spirit

Of course, if men are only partly depraved (which is *really* the belief today of the vast majority of preachers and their hearers, never having been experimentally taught by God *their own* depravity), if deep down in their hearts all men really love God, if they are so good-natured as to be easily persuaded to become Christians, then there is no need for the Holy Spirit to put forth His Almighty power and do for them what they are altogether incapable of doing for themselves. And again, if “being saved” consists merely in believing I am a lost sinner and on my way to hell, and by simply believing that God loves me, that Christ died for me, and that He will save me now on the one condition that I “accept Him as my personal Savior” and “rest upon His finished work,” then no supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit are required to induce and enable me to fulfill *that* condition—self-interest moves me to, and a decision of my will is all that is required.

But if, on the other hand, all men *hate* God (Joh 15:23, 25), and have minds that are “enmity against him” (Rom 8:7), so that “there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11), preferring and determining to follow their own inclinations and pleasures; if instead of being disposed unto that which is good, “the heart of the sons of men is *fully* set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11); and if when the overtures of God’s mercy are made known to them and they are freely invited to avail themselves of the same, they “*all* with one consent begin to make excuse” (Luk 14:18)—then it is very evident that the invincible power and transforming operations of the Spirit are *indispensably*

required if the heart of a sinner is [to be] thoroughly changed, so that rebellion gives place to submission and hatred to love. This is why Christ said, “No man can come to me, *except* the Father [by the Spirit] which hath sent me *draw* him” (Joh 6:44).

Again, if the Lord Jesus Christ came here to uphold and enforce the high claims of God, rather than to lower or set them aside; if He declared that “strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat 7:14), rather than pointing to a smooth and broad road that anyone would find it easy to tread; if the salvation that He has provided is a deliverance from sin and self-pleasing, from worldliness and indulging the lusts of the flesh, and the bestowing of a nature that desires and determines to live for *God’s* glory and to please Him in *all* the details of our present lives—then it is clear beyond dispute that none but the Spirit of God can impart a genuine desire for *such* a salvation. And if instead of “accepting Christ” and “resting upon His finished work” be the sole condition of salvation,¹ He demands that the sinner throw down the weapons of his defiance, abandon every idol, unreservedly surrender himself and his life, and receive Him as His only Lord and Master,² then nothing but a miracle of *grace* can enable any captive of Satan’s to meet

¹ **sole condition of salvation** – Pink is not saying that trusting Christ and His finished work are not vital in conversion. He is contrasting modern “easy-believism” (a distorted, abbreviated version of the gospel which leaves out repentance) with the Biblical gospel that Jesus and the Apostles preached. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15, *see also* Act 20:20, 21).

Conversion to Christ consists of two elements: repentance and faith. Repentance comes from the Greek *metanoia*, which means “a change of mind.” Faith is the Greek *pistis*, which is the mental act of believing. Believing, the Greek *pisteuo*, includes understanding and committing oneself to the truth regarding Jesus Christ and His saving work as revealed in the Bible. Repentance and faith spring from the Holy Spirit’s work in the new birth and are inseparable: “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). Saving faith is always accompanied by repentance and true repentance is always accompanied by faith. Opponents of calling men to repent when preaching the Gospel say that this adds “works” to salvation, which is by faith alone (Eph 2:8, 9). This is a misunderstanding of Scripture. God “commandeth all men every where to repent” (Act 17:30). Repentance, like faith, is a gift of the Holy Spirit: “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31; *see also* Act 3:26; 11:18; 2Ti 2:25). Sinners must repent; but even their repentance is a gift of God’s grace by the Holy Spirit—*Editor*.

² The repenting sinner looks by faith to Jesus Christ as Lord *and* Savior, because this is the way the Scriptures and the Gospel present Him: “Preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)” (Act 10:36; *see also* Luk 2:11; Act 2:36; 11:17; 15:11; 16:31; Col 2:6). Modern religionists often separate Christ’s being Savior from His Lordship; but this is destructive of the gospel and biblical Christianity. Saving faith believes the truths of Scripture regarding the Lord *and* Savior Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone to be the sinner’s righteousness: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:22). The Scriptures and therefore biblical preaching declare Jesus Lord and Savior. These must not be divided—*Editor*.

such requirements.³

Objections to Total Depravity Proved False

Against what has been said above it may be objected that no such hatred of God as we have affirmed exists in the hearts of the great majority of our fellow-creatures—that while there may be a few degenerates who have sold themselves to the devil and are thoroughly hardened in sin, yet the remainder of mankind are friendly disposed to God, as is evident by the countless millions who have some form or other of religion. To such an objector we reply, The fact is, dear friend, that those to whom you refer are almost entirely ignorant of *the God of Scripture*: they have heard that He loves everybody, is benevolently inclined toward all His creatures, and is so easy-going that, in return for their religious performances, will wink at their sins. Of course, they have no hatred for such a “god” as this! But tell them something of the character of the true God: that He hates “all the workers of iniquity” (Psa 5:5), that He is inexorably⁴ just and ineffably⁵ holy, that He is an uncontrollable Sovereign, Who “hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:18)—and their enmity against Him will soon be manifested, an enmity that none but the Holy Spirit can overcome.

It may be objected again that so far from the gloomy picture which we have sketched above being accurate, the great majority of people *do* desire to be saved (from having to suffer a penalty for their sin), and they make more or less endeavor after their salvation. This is readily granted. There is in every human heart a desire for deliverance from misery and a longing after happiness and security, and those who come under the sound of God’s Word are *naturally* disposed to be delivered from the wrath to come and wish to be assured that heaven will be their eternal dwelling-place; who *wants* to endure the everlasting burnings? But that desire and disposition is quite compatible and consistent with the greatest love to sin and most entire opposition of heart to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). What the objector here refers to is a vastly different thing from desiring heaven upon *God’s* terms, and being willing to tread the *only* path that leads there!

The instinct of self-preservation is sufficiently strong to move multitudes to undertake many performances and penances in the hope that thereby they shall escape hell. The stronger men’s belief of the truth of divine revelation; the more firmly they

³ **such requirements** – In arguing his case that repentance from sin is indeed part of saving faith in every true believer, the author uses language such as “requirements” and “conditions” that must be met. He most emphatically does *not* mean that the person must work up these in himself in order to be saved, but rather that these are gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted to the believer at the time of regeneration (see the next chapter), and therefore repentance and a hatred of sin will always be present in every true believer—*Editor*.

⁴ **inexorably** – without yielding; inflexibly.

⁵ **ineffably** – inexpressibly.

become convinced that there is a Day of Judgment, when they must appear before their Maker and render an account of all their desires, thoughts, words, and deeds—the most serious and sober will be their minds. Let conscience convict them of their misspent lives, and they are ready to turn over a new leaf; let them be persuaded that Christ stands ready as a fire-escape and is willing to rescue them, though the world still claims their hearts—and thousands are ready to “believe in Him.” Yes, this is done by multitudes who still hate the true character of the Savior, and reject with all their hearts the salvation that *He* has. Far, far different is this from an unregenerate person longing for deliverance *from self and sin*, and the impartation of that *holiness* which Christ purchased for His people.

All around us are those willing to receive Christ as their Savior, who are altogether unwilling to surrender to Him as their Lord. They would like His peace, but they refuse His “yoke,” without which *His* peace cannot be found (Mat 11:29). They admire His promises, but have no heart for His precepts. They will rest upon His priestly work, but will not be subject to His kingly scepter. They will believe in a “Christ” who is suited to their own corrupt tastes or sentimental dreams, but they despise and reject the Christ of God. Like the multitudes of old, they want His loaves and fishes; but for His heart-searching, flesh-withering, sin-condemning teaching, they have no appetite. They approve of Him as the Healer of their bodies, but as the Healer of their depraved souls they desire Him not. And nothing but the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit can change this bias and bent in any soul.

It is just because modern Christendom has such an inadequate estimate of the fearful and universal effects that the Fall has wrought, that the imperative need for the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is now so little realized. It is because such false conceptions of human depravity so widely prevail that, in most places, it is supposed all which is needed to save half of the community is to hire some popular evangelist and attractive singer. And the reason why so few *are* aware of the awful depths of human depravity, the terrible enmity of the carnal mind against God, and the heart’s inbred and inveterate⁶ hatred of Him, is because His *character* is now so rarely declared from the pulpit. If the preachers would deliver the same type of messages as did Jeremiah in his degenerate age, or even as John the Baptist did, they would soon discover how their hearers were *really* affected toward God—and then they would perceive that, unless the power of the Spirit attended their preaching, they might as well be silent.

⁶ **inveterate** – deep-rooted; long-established.

2. The Spirit Regenerating

“According to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”—Titus 3:5

Self-Regeneration Is Impossible

The absolute necessity for the regenerating operation of the Holy Spirit in order for a sinner’s being converted to God lies in his being totally depraved. Fallen man is without the least degree of right disposition or principles from which holy exercises may proceed. He is completely under a contrary disposition: there is no right exercise of heart in him, but *every* motion of his will is corrupt and sinful. If this were not the case, there would be no need for him to be born again and made “a new creature.” If the sinner were not wholly corrupt, he would submit to Christ without any supernatural operation of the Spirit; but fallen man is so completely sunk in corruption that he has not the faintest real desire for God, but is filled with enmity against Him (Rom 8:7). Therefore does Scripture affirm him to be “*dead* in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, to them which believe on his name: Which were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*” (Joh 1:12-13).

The latter verse expounds the former. There an explanation is given as to why any fallen descendant of Adam ever spiritually receives Christ as His Lord and Master, and savingly believes on His name.

First, it is not because grace runs in the blood—as the Jews supposed. Holiness is not transmitted from father to son. The child of the most pious parents is by nature equally as corrupt and is as far from God as is the offspring of infidels.

Second, it is not because of any natural willingness, as Arminians⁷ contend: “nor of the will of the flesh” refers to man in his natural and corrupt state. He is not regenerated by any instinct, choice, or exertion of his own; he does not by any personal endeavor contribute anything towards being born again; nor does he cooperate in the least degree with the efficient cause—instead, every inclination of his heart, every exercise of his will, is in direct opposition thereto.

Third, the new birth is not brought about by the power and influence of others. No sinner is ever born again as the result of the persuasions and endeavors of preachers or

⁷ **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s salvation is based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by *their own free will*.

Christian workers.⁸ However pious and wise they are, and however earnestly and strenuously they exert themselves to bring others to holiness, they do in no degree produce the effect.

“If all the angels and saints in heaven and all the godly on earth should join their wills and endeavors and unitedly exert all their powers to regenerate one sinner, they could not effect it; yea, they could do nothing toward it. It is an effect *infinitely* beyond the reach of finite wisdom and power (1Co 3:6-7)” (S. Hopkins⁹).

Regeneration Is the Sole Work of the Spirit

In regeneration, one of God’s elect is the subject and the Spirit of God is the sole agent. The subject of the new birth is wholly passive: he does not act, but is acted upon. The sovereign work of the Spirit in the soul precedes all holy exercises of heart, such as sorrow for sin, faith in Christ, love toward God. This great change is wrought in spite of all the opposition of the natural heart against God: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom 9:16). This great change is not a gradual and protracted process, but is *instantaneous*: in an instant of time the favored subject of it passes from death unto life.

Holiness: the Manifestation of Regeneration

Holiness in the heart is the main and ultimate birth brought forth in regeneration, for to make us partakers of God’s holiness is the sum and scope of His gracious purpose toward us, both of His election (Eph 1:4), and of all His dealings afterward (Heb 12:10), without which “no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). Not that finite creatures can ever be partakers of the essential holiness that is in God, either by imputation,¹⁰ or much less by real transubstantiation.¹¹ We can be no otherwise partakers of it than in the *image* thereof—“which after God [as pattern or prototype] is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24); “after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10).

Regeneration is the first discovery and manifestation of election and redemption to the persons for whom they were intended: “But after the kindness and love of God our

⁸ Pink is not saying that preachers are not used of God to persuade men to believe in Christ. Paul “reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Act 18:4; *see also* Act 19:8, 26; 28:16-18; 28:23). Pink is saying that the preacher has no power in himself to convert men; the Holy Spirit opens the sinner’s heart to the preacher’s persuasion: “And a certain woman named Lydia...heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Act 16:14).

⁹ **Samuel Hopkins** (1721-1803) – American Congregationalist, theologian of the late colonial era. He graduated from Yale College and studied divinity under Jonathan Edwards. He pastored congregations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

¹⁰ **imputation** – giving by God apart from men’s works.

¹¹ **transubstantiation** – change of one substance into another.

Savior toward man *appeared*” (Ti 3:4)—and *how* and *when* did it appear? “According to his mercy he saved us *by* the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (v. 5).

“God’s eternal love, like a mighty river, had from everlasting run, as it were, underground. When Christ came, it took its course through His heart, hiddenly ran through it, He bearing on the cross the names of them whom God had given Him; but was yet still hidden from us, and our knowledge of it. But the first breaking of it forth, and particular appearing of it in and to the persons, is when we are converted, and is as the first opening of a fountain”—Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679).

Summary

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (1Th 5:9-10). Yet, the Father’s appointment and the Son’s redemption, with all the unspeakable blessings thereof, remained for a season quite unknown to us. In their fallen, sinful, and guilty state, Christians lay “dead in trespasses and sins,” without hope. To bring them out of this state, and raise them from a death of sin into a life of righteousness, is the great and grand work reserved for the Holy Spirit, in order to display and make manifest thereby His love for them.

The Holy Spirit is fully acquainted with the present and everlasting virtue and efficacy¹² of the Person and work of Immanuel, and what His heart was set upon when He made His soul an offering for sin, and how infinitely and eternally well pleased was Jehovah the Father with it, Who has it in perpetual remembrance. The Father and the Son having committed the revelation and application of this great salvation unto the persons of all the elect *to the Holy Spirit*, He is pleased therefore, out of the riches of His own free and sovereign grace, to work in due season in all the heirs of glory. And as Christ died but once—His death being all-sufficient to answer every design to be effected by it—so the Holy Spirit *by one act* works effectually in the soul, producing a spiritual birth and changing the state of its partaker once and for all, so that the regenerated are brought out of and delivered from the power of death and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Without this spiritual birth we cannot see spiritual objects and heavenly blessings in their true worth and excellence.

The effect of the new birth is that the man born again loves spiritual things *as spiritual*, and values spiritual blessings on account of their being purely spiritual. The spring of life from Christ enters into him, and is the spring of all his spiritual life, the root of all his graces, the perpetual source of every divine principle within him. So says Christ: “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into

¹² **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect; effectiveness.

everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). This regeneration introduces the elect into a capacity for the enjoyments that are peculiar to the spiritual world, and makes the one alteration in their state before God that lasts forever. *All* our meetness for the heavenly state is wrought at our regeneration (Col 1:12-13). Regeneration is one and the same in all saints. It admits of no increase or diminution.¹³ All grace and holiness are then imparted by the Spirit: His subsequent work is but to draw it forth into exercise and act.

3. The Spirit Quickening

“It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.”
—John 6:63

We shall now confine ourselves to the *initial* operation of the Spirit within the elect of God. Different writers have employed the term “regeneration” with varying latitude: some restricting it unto a single act, others including the whole process by which one becomes a conscious child of God. This has hindered close accuracy of thought, and has introduced considerable confusion through the confounding of things that, though intimately related, are quite distinct. Not only has confusion of thought resulted from a loose use of terms, but serious divisions among professing saints have issued therefrom. We believe that much, if not all, of this would have been avoided had theologians discriminated more sharply and clearly between the principle of grace (spiritual life) that the Spirit first imparts unto the soul, and His consequent stirrings of that principle into exercise.

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (Joh 5:21); “It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing” (Joh 6:63). All the divine operations in the economy of salvation proceed *from* the Father, are *through* the Son, and are executed *by* the Spirit. Quickening is His *initial* work in the elect. It is that supernatural act by which He brings them out of the grave of spiritual death onto resurrection ground. By it He imparts a principle of grace and habit of holiness; it is the communication of the life of God to the soul. It is an act of creation (2Co 5:17). It is a divine “workmanship” (Eph 2:10). All of these terms denote an act of Omnipotency. The origination of life is utterly impossible to the creature. He can receive life; he can nourish life; he can use and exert it; but he cannot create life.

This quickening by the Spirit is *instantaneous*: it is a divine act and not a process; it is wrought at once, and not gradually. In a moment of time the soul passes from death unto life. The soul that before was dead toward God, is now alive to Him. The soul that was completely under the domination of sin, is now set free; though the sinful nature itself is not removed nor rendered inoperative, yet the heart is no longer

¹³ **diminution** – lessening; decrease.

*en rapport*¹⁴ with it. The Spirit of God finds the heart wholly corrupt and desperately wicked, but by a miracle of grace He changes its bent, and this by implanting within it the imperishable seed of holiness. There is no medium between a carnal and a spiritual state: the one is what we were by nature, the other is what we become by grace, by the instantaneous and invincible operation of the Almighty Spirit.

Only the Beginning

Let it be pointed out in conclusion that the Spirit's quickening is only the *beginning* of God's work of grace in the soul. This does not wholly renew the heart at once: no indeed, the inner man needs to be "renewed day by day" (2Co 4:16). But from that small beginning, the work continues—God watering it "every moment" (Isa 27:3)—and goes on to perfection; that is, till the heart is made perfectly clean and holy, which is not accomplished till death. God continues to work in His elect, "both to will and to do of his good pleasure," they being as completely dependent upon the Spirit's influence for every right exercise of the will after, as for the first. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work within you *will finish it* until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phi 1:6).

4. The Spirit Enlightening

*"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may
be of God, and not of us."—2 Corinthians 4:6-7*

"It is true that many a carnal man is ravished to think that God loves him, and will save him; but in this case, it is not the true character of God which charms the heart: it is not *God* that is loved. Strictly speaking, he can only love himself, and self-love is the source of all his affections. Or, if we call it 'love' to God, it is of no other kind than sinners feel to one another: 'for sinners also love those that love them' (Luk 6:32). The carnal Israelites gave the fullest proof of their disaffection to the divine character (in the wilderness), as exhibited by God Himself before their eyes, yet were once full of this same kind of 'love' at the side of the Red Sea" (Joseph Bellamy).¹⁵

My reader, the mere fact that your heart is thrilled with a belief that God loves you is no proof whatever that God's *true* character would suit your taste, had you right

¹⁴ *en rapport* – French: in harmony; in sympathy; in accord.

¹⁵ **Joseph Bellamy** (1719-1790) – New England Congregationalist preacher, author, theologian; studied under Jonathan Edwards and was a powerful revivalist of the Great Awakening; preached in Bethlehem, Connecticut, for 52 years. Born in Cheshire, Connecticut.

notions of it. The Galatians loved Paul while they considered him as the instrument of their conversion; but on further acquaintance with him, they turned his enemies, for his character, rightly understood, was not at all congenial to them. If God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” and cannot but look upon sin with infinite detestation (Hab 1:13); if all those imaginations, affections, and actions that are so sweet to the taste of a carnal heart, are so infinitely odious in the eyes of God as to appear to Him worthy of the eternal pains of hell, then it is utterly impossible for a carnal heart to see any beauty in the divine character, until it perceives its own character to be infinitely odious.

There is no spiritual love for the true God until self be hated. The one necessarily implies the other. I cannot look upon God as a lovely Being, without looking upon myself as infinitely vile and hateful. When Christ said to the Pharisees, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Mat 23:33), those words determined His character in their eyes. And it implies a contradiction to suppose that Christ’s character might appear lovely to them, *without* their own appearing odious, answerable to the import of His words. There was nothing in a Pharisee’s heart to look upon his own character in such a detestable light, and therefore all the Savior’s words and works could only exasperate them. The more they knew of Christ, the more they hated Him; as it was natural to approve of their own character, so it was natural to condemn His.

The Pharisees were completely under the power of “darkness,” and so is every human being till the Spirit quickens him into newness of life. If the fault were not in the Pharisees, it must have been in Christ; and for them to own that it was *not* in Christ, was to acknowledge *they* were “vipers” and worthy of eternal destruction. They could not look upon Him as *lovely*, until they looked upon themselves as *infinitely odious*; but *that* was diametrically opposite to every bias of their hearts. Their old heart, therefore, *must* be taken away, and a new heart be given them, or they would never view things in a true light. “Except a man be born again, he *cannot* see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3).

Manifestations of Enlightenment

By this “anointing” or enlightenment the quickened soul is enabled to perceive the true nature of sin—opposition against God, expressed in self-pleasing. By it he discerns the plague of his own heart and finds that he is a moral leper, totally depraved, corrupt at the very center of his being. By it he detects the deceptions of Satan, which formerly made him believe that bitter was sweet, and sweet bitter. By it he apprehends the claims of God: that He is absolutely worthy of and infinitely entitled to be loved with all his heart, soul, and strength. By it he learns God’s *way of* salvation: that the path of

practical holiness is the only one that leads to heaven.¹⁶ By it he beholds the perfect suitability and sufficiency of Christ: that He is the only One Who could meet all God's claims upon him. By it he feels his own impotence unto all that is good, and presents himself as an empty vessel to be filled out of Christ's fullness.

A divine light now shines into the quickened soul. Before, he was "darkness," but now is he "light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8). He now perceives that those things in which he once found pleasure are loathsome and damnable. His former concepts of the world and its enjoyments, he now sees to be erroneous and ensnaring, and apprehends that no real happiness or contentment is to be found in any of them. That holiness of heart and strictness of life which before he criticized as needless preciseness or puritanical extreme, is now looked upon not only as absolutely necessary, but as most beautiful and blessed. Those moral and religious performances he once prided himself in and which he supposed merited the approval of God, he now regards as filthy rags. Those whom he once envied, he now pities. The company he once delighted in now sickens and saddens him. His whole outlook is completely changed!

Divine illumination, then, is the Holy Spirit imparting to the quickened soul accurate and spiritual views of divine things. To hear and *understand* is peculiar to the "good-ground" hearer (Mat 13:23). None but the *real* "disciple" *knows* the truth (Joh 8:31-32). Even the gospel is "hid" from the lost (2Co 4:4). But when a quickened soul is enlightened by the Spirit, he has a feeling realization of the excellence of the divine character, the spirituality of God's Law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general and of his own vileness in particular. It is a divine work that capacitates the soul to have real communion with God, to receive or take in spiritual objects, enjoy them, and live upon them.

5. The Spirit Convicting

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it."—Isaiah 40:7

Though man in his natural estate is spiritually dead, that is, entirely destitute of any spark of *true holiness*, yet is he still a rational being and has a conscience by which he is capable of perceiving the difference between good and evil, and of discerning and feeling the force of moral obligation (Rom 1:32; 2:15). By having his sins clearly brought to his mind and conscience, he can be made to realize what his true condition is as a transgressor of the holy Law of God. This sight and sense of sin, when aroused from moral stupor, under the common operations of the Holy Spirit, is usually termed "conviction of sin"; and there can be no doubt that the views and feelings of men may

¹⁶ **way of salvation...leads to heaven** – The author here focuses on the walk of the believer after the Lord regenerates his soul. He does not mean that holiness is a way of earning initial salvation from sin—*Editor*.

be very clear and strong even while they are in an unregenerate state. Indeed, they do not differ in *kind* (though they do in degree) from what men will experience in the Day of Judgment, when their own consciences shall condemn them, and they shall stand guilty before God (Rom 3:19).

Not “Conviction of Sin”

But there is nothing whatever in the kind of conviction of sin mentioned above that has any tendency to *change the heart* or make it better. No matter how clear or how strong such convictions are, there is nothing in them which approximates to those that the Spirit produces in those whom He quickens. Such convictions may be accompanied by the most alarming apprehensions of danger, the imagination may be filled with the most frightful images of terror, and hell may seem almost uncovered to their terrified view. Very often, under the sound of the faithful preaching of eternal punishment, some are aroused from their lethargy and feelings of the utmost terror are awakened in their souls, while there is no real *spiritual* conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. On the other hand, there may be deep and permanent spiritual convictions where the passions and the imagination are very little excited.

Solemn is it to realize that there are now in hell multitudes of men and women who on earth were visited with deep conviction of sin, whose awakened conscience made them conscious of their rebellion against their Maker, who were made to feel something of the reality of the everlasting burnings, and the *justice* of God meting out such punishment to those who spurn His authority and trample His laws beneath their feet. How solemn to realize that many of those who experienced such convictions were aroused to flee from the wrath to come, and became very zealous and diligent in seeking to escape the torments of hell, and who under the instinct of self-preservation took up with “religion” as offering the desired means of escape. And how unspeakably solemn to realize that many of those poor souls fell victim to men who spoke “smooth things,” assuring them that they were the objects of God’s love, and that nothing more was needed than to “receive Christ as your personal Savior.” How unspeakably solemn, we say, that such souls look to Christ merely as a *fire-escape*, who never—from a supernatural work of the Spirit in their hearts—surrendered to Christ as *Lord*.¹⁷

Does the reader say, “Such statements as the above are most unsettling, and if dwelt upon would destroy my peace.” We answer, O that it *may* please God to use these pages to disturb some who have long enjoyed a *false* peace. Better far, dear reader, to be upset, yea, searched and terrified *now*, than die in the *false* comfort produced by Satan, and weep and wail for all eternity. If you are unwilling to be tested and searched, that is clear proof that you *lack* an “honest heart.” An “honest” heart desires to know the truth. An “honest” heart hates pretense. An “honest” heart is fearful of

¹⁷ **Christ as Lord** – For more on this, see “Is Christ Your Lord?” tract available from Chapel Library.

being deceived. An “honest” heart welcomes the most searching diagnosis of its condition. An “honest” heart is humble and tractable,¹⁸ not proud, presumptuous, and self-confident. O how very few there are who *really* possess an “honest heart.”

Characteristics of the Spirit’s True Conviction

The “honest” heart will say, “If it is possible for an unregenerate soul to experience the convictions of sin you have depicted above, if one who is dead in trespasses and sins may, nevertheless, have a vivid and frightful anticipation of the wrath to come, and engage in such sincere and earnest endeavors to escape from the same, then how am I to ascertain whether *my* convictions have been of a different kind from theirs?” A very pertinent and a most important question, dear friend. In answering the same, let us first point out that *soul terrors of hell* are not, in themselves, any proof of a *supernatural* work of God having been wrought in the heart: it is not horrifying alarms of the everlasting burnings felt in the heart that distinguishes the experience of quickened souls from that of the unquickened; though such alarms *are* felt (in varying degrees) by both classes.

In His particular saving work of conviction, the Holy Spirit occupies the soul more with *sin itself* than with punishment. This is an exercise of the mind to which fallen men are exceedingly averse: they had rather meditate on almost anything than upon their own wickedness: neither argument, entreaty, nor warning will induce them to do so; nor will Satan suffer one of his captives—till a mightier One comes and frees him—to dwell upon sin, its nature, and vileness. No, he constantly employs all his subtle arts to keep his victim from such occupation, and his temptations and delusions are mixed with the natural darkness and vanity of men’s hearts, so as to fortify them against convictions—so that he may keep “his goods in *peace*” (Luk 11:21).

Summary of Differences in “Conviction”

In summary, there is a very real and radical difference between that conviction of sin which many of the unregenerate experience under the common operations of the Spirit, and that conviction of sin which follows His work of quickening and enlightening the hearts of God’s elect. We have pointed out that in the case of the latter, the conscience is occupied more with *sin itself* than with its punishment; with the real *nature* of sin as rebellion against God; with its exceeding sinfulness as enmity against God; with the multitude of sins, every action being polluted; with the character and claims of God as showing the awful disparity there is between Him and us. Where the soul has not only been made to perceive, but also to *feel*—to have a heart-horror and anguish over the same—there is good reason to believe that the work of divine grace has been begun in the soul.

¹⁸ **tractable** – easily controlled or influenced.

Many other contrasts may be given between that conviction which issues from the common operations of the Spirit in the unregenerate and His special work in the regenerate. The convictions of the former are generally light and uncertain, and of short duration; they are sudden frights that soon subside—whereas those of the latter are deep, pungent, and lasting, being *repeated* more or less frequently throughout life. The former work is more upon the emotions; the latter upon the judgment. The former diminishes in its clarity and efficacy; the latter grows in its intensity and power. The former arises from a consideration of God’s justice; the latter are more intense when the heart is occupied with God’s goodness. The former springs from a horrified sense of God’s power; the latter issues from a reverent view of His holiness.

Unregenerate souls regard eternal punishment as the greatest evil, but the regenerate look upon *sin* as the worst thing there is. The former groan under conscience’s presages¹⁹ of damnation; the latter mourn from a sense of their lack of holiness. The greatest longing of the one is to be assured of escape from the wrath to come; the supreme desire of the other is to be delivered from the burden of sin and conformed to the image of Christ. The former, while he may be convicted of many sins, still cherishes the conceit that he has some good points; the latter is painfully conscious that in his flesh there “dwelleth *no* good thing,” and that his best performances are defiled. The former greedily snatches at comfort, for assurance and peace are now regarded as the highest good; the latter fears that he has sinned beyond the hope of forgiveness, and is slow to believe the glad tidings of God’s grace. The convictions of the former harden, those of the latter melt and lead to submission. (The above two paragraphs are condensed from the Puritan Charnock).

Means of the Spirit’s Convicting: Use of the Law

The great instrument which the Holy Spirit uses in this special work of conviction is the Law, for that is the one rule which God has given whereby we are to judge of the moral good or evil of actions, and conviction is nothing more or less than the *formal impression of sin by the Law upon the conscience*. Clear proof of this is found in the passages that follow. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20): it is the design of all laws to impress the understanding with what is to be done, and consequently with man’s deviation from them. And so absolutely necessary is the law for this discernment, the Apostle Paul declared, “I had not known sin but by the law” (Rom 7:7)—its real nature as opposition to God; its inveterate enmity against Him; its unsuspected lustings within. “The law entered that sin might abound” (Rom 5:20), by deepening and widening the conviction of sin upon the conscience.

Here is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30:6, “The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart.” The blessed Spirit uses the sharp knife of the Law, pierces the conscience, and convicts of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. By this divine operation, the hardness

¹⁹ **presages** – indications or warnings of a future occurrence.

of the heart is removed, and the iniquity of it laid open, the plague and corruption of it discovered—and all is made naked to the soul's view. The sinner is now exceedingly pained over his rebellions against God, is broken down before Him, is filled with shame, and loathes and abhors himself. "Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child: wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer 30:6-7)—such is, sooner or later, the experience of all God's quickened people.

6. The Spirit Comforting

"Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden."
—Matthew 11:28

Several Sequential Steps

The saving work of the Spirit in the heart of God's elect is a gradual and progressive one, conducting the soul step by step in the due method and order of the gospel to Christ. Where there is no self-condemnation and humiliation there can be no saving faith in the Lord Jesus: "Ye repented not afterward, *that ye might believe him*" (Mat 21:32) was His own express affirmation. It is the burdensome sense of sin that prepares the soul for the Savior: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are *heavy laden*" (Mat 11:28). Without conviction, there can be no contrition and compunction:²⁰ he that sees not his wickedness and guilt never mourns for it; he that feels not his filthiness and wretchedness never bewails it.

Never was there one tear of true repentance seen to drop from the eye of an unconvicted sinner. Equally true is it that without illumination there can be no conviction, for what is conviction but the application to the heart and conscience of the light that the Spirit has communicated to the mind and understanding (Act 2:37). So, likewise, there can be no effectual illumination until there has been a divine quickening, for a dead soul can neither see nor feel in a spiritual manner. In this order, then, the Spirit draws souls to Christ: He

- brings them from death unto life,
- shines into their minds,
- applies the light to their consciences by effectual conviction,
- wounds and breaks their hearts for sin in compunction, and then
- moves the will to embrace Christ in the way of faith for salvation.

²⁰ **compunction** – stinging of the conscience following sin.

These several steps are more distinctly discerned in some Christians than in others. They are more clearly to be traced in the *adult* convert than in those who are brought to Christ in their youth. So, too, they are more easily perceived in such as are drawn to Him out of a state of *profaneness* than those who had the advantages of a pious education. Yet in them, too, after conversion, the exercises of their hearts—following a period of declension and backsliding—correspond thereto. But *in this order* the work of the Spirit is carried on, ordinarily, in all; however it may differ in point of clearness in the one and in the other. God is a God of order both in nature and in grace, though He be tied down to no hard and fast rules.

Weaned from the World

By His mighty work of illumination and conviction, with the humiliation that is wrought in the soul, the Spirit effectually weans the heart forever from the comfort, pleasure, satisfaction, or joy that is to be found in sin, or in any creature, so that his soul can never be quiet and contented, happy or satisfied, till it finds the comfort of God in Christ. Once the soul is made to feel that sin is the greatest of all evils, it sours for him the things of the world, he has lost his deep relish for them forever, and nothing is now so desirable unto him as the favor of God. All creature comforts have been everlastingly marred and spoiled, and unless he finds comfort in the Lord, there is none for him anywhere.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hos 2:14). When God would win His church’s heart to Him, what does He do? He brings her into “*the wilderness*,” that is, into a place that is barren or devoid of all comforts and delights; and then and there He “speaks comfort to her.” Thus, too, He deals with the individual. A man who has been effectually convicted by the Spirit is like a man condemned to die: what pleasure would be derived from the beautiful flowers as a murderer was led through a lovely garden to the place of execution? Nor can any Spirit-convicted sinner find contentment in anything till he is assured of the favor of Him Whom he has so grievously offended. And none but *God* can “speak comfortably” to one so stricken.

The Nature of the Spirit’s Comforting in Suffering

“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

“And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in

the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.

“And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor [trouble] for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

—Hosea 2:6-15

“And I will give her vineyards *from thence*, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope” (Hos 2:15). Such is the comforting promise of God to the one whom He proposes to “allure” or win unto Himself. First, He hedges up the sinner’s way with “thorns” (Hos 2:6), piercing his conscience with the sharp arrows of conviction. Second, He effectually battles all his attempts to drown his sorrows and find satisfaction again in his former lovers (v. 7). Third, He discovers his spiritual nakedness, and makes all his mirth to cease (vv. 10-11). Fourth, He brings him into “the wilderness” (v. 14), making him feel his case is desperate indeed. And then, when all hope is gone, when the poor sinner feels there is no salvation for him, “a door of *hope*” is opened for him even in “the valley of Achor,” or “trouble”—and what is that “door of hope” but the *mercy* of God!

It is by putting into his mind thoughts of God’s mercy that the Spirit supports the fainting heart of the convicted sinner from sinking beneath abject despair. Now it is that the blessed Spirit helps his infirmities with “groanings that cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26), and in the midst of a thousand fears he is moved to cry, “God be merciful *to me* a sinner” (Luk 18:13).

No Place for a “Decision” to Be Saved

One would naturally suppose that the good news of a free Savior and a full salvation would readily be embraced by a convicted sinner. One would think that, as soon as he heard the glad tidings, he could not forbear exclaiming, in a transport of joy, “This is the Savior I want! *His* salvation is every way suited to my wretchedness. What can I desire more? Here will I rest.” But as a matter of fact this is not always the case; yea, it is rarely so. Instead, the stricken sinner, like the Hebrews in Egypt after Moses had

been made manifest before them, is left to groan under the lash of his merciless taskmasters. Yet this arises from no defect in God's gracious provision, nor because of any inadequacy in the salvation that the gospel presents, nor because of any distress in the sinner that the gospel is incapable of relieving; but because the workings of self-righteousness hinder the sinner from seeing the fullness and glory of divine grace.

Strange as it may sound to those who have but a superficial and non-experimental acquaintance with God's truth, awakened souls are exceedingly backward from receiving comfort in the glorious gospel of Christ. They think they are utterly unworthy and unfit to come to Christ just as they are, in all their vileness and filthiness. They imagine some meetness must be wrought in them before they are qualified to believe the gospel, that there must be certain holy dispositions in their hearts before they are entitled to conclude that Christ will receive them. They fear that they are not sufficiently humbled under a sense of sin, that they have not a suitable abhorrence of it, that their repentance is not deep enough; that they must have fervent breathings after Christ and pantings after holiness before they can be warranted to seek salvation with a well-grounded hope of success—all of which is the same thing as hugging the miseries of unbelief in order to obtain permission *to* believe.

Burdened with guilt and filled with terrifying apprehensions of eternal destruction, the convicted sinner—yet experimentally ignorant of the perfect righteousness that the gospel reveals for the justification of the ungodly—strives to obtain acceptance with God by his own labors, tears, and prayers. But, as he becomes better acquainted with the high demands of the Law, the holiness of God, and the corruptions of his own heart, he reaches the point where he utterly despairs of being justified by his own strivings. “What *must* I do to be saved?” is now his agonized cry. Diligently searching God's Word for light and help, he discovers that “faith” is the all-important thing needed, but exactly what faith is, and how it is to be obtained, he is completely at a loss to ascertain. Well-meaning people, with more zeal than knowledge, urge him *to* “believe,” which is the one thing above all others he desires to do, but finds himself utterly *unable to* perform.

If saving faith were nothing more than a mere mental assent to the contents of John 3:16, then any man could make himself a true believer whenever he pleased—the supernatural enablement of the Holy Spirit would be quite unnecessary. But *saving* faith is very much more than a mental assenting to the contents of any verse of Scripture; and when a soul has been *divinely* quickened and awakened to its awful state by nature, it is made to realize that no creature-act of faith, no resting on the bare letter of a text by a “decision” of his own will, can bring pardon and peace. He is now made to realize that “faith” is a *divine gift* (Eph 2:8-9), and not a creature work; that it is wrought by “the *operation of God*” (Col 2:12), and not by the sinner himself. He is now made conscious of the fact that if ever he is to be saved, the same God Who invites him to believe (Isa 45:22), yea, Who *commands* him to believe (1Jo 3:23), must also *impart* faith to him (Eph 6:23).

Cannot you see, dear reader, that if a saving belief in Christ were the *easy* matter that the vast majority of preachers and evangelists of today *say* it is, that the work of the Spirit would be *quite unnecessary*? Ah, is there any wonder that the mighty power of the Spirit of God is now so rarely witnessed in Christendom? He has been grieved, insulted, quenched, not only by the skepticism and worldliness of “Modernists,” but equally so by the creature-exalting free-willism and self-ability of man to “receive Christ as his personal Savior” of the “Fundamentalists”! Oh, how very few today *really* believe those clear and emphatic words of Christ, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me [by His Spirit] draw him” (Joh 6:44).

Ah, my reader, when GOD truly takes a soul in hand, He brings him to the *end of himself*. He not only convicts him of the worthlessness of his own works, but He convinces him of the impotence of his will. He not only strips him of the filthy rags of his own self-righteousness, but He empties him of all self-sufficiency. He not only enables him to perceive that there is “no good thing” in him (Rom 7:18), but he also makes him feel he is “*without* strength” (Rom 5:6). Instead of concluding that he is the man whom God will save, he now fears that he is the man who must be lost forever. He is now brought down into the very dust, and made to feel that he is no more able to savingly believe in Christ than he can climb up to heaven.

We are well aware that what has been said above differs radically from the current preaching of this decadent age, but we will appeal to the experience of the Christian reader. Suppose you had just suffered a heavy financial reversal and were at your wits’ end to know how to make ends meet: bills are owing, your bank has closed, you look in vain for employment, and are filled with fears over future prospects. A preacher calls and rebukes your unbelief, bidding you lay hold of the promises of God. *That* is the very thing which you *desire* to do, but *can* you by an act of your own will? Or, a loved one is suddenly snatched from you; your heart is crushed, grief overwhelms you. A friend kindly bids you to “sorrow not even as others who have no hope” (1Th 4:13). Are you able by a “personal decision” to throw off your anguish and rejoice in the Lord? Ah, my reader, if a mature Christian can only “cast all his care” upon the Lord *by the Holy Spirit’s gracious enablement*, do you suppose that a poor sinner who is yet “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity” (Act 8:23) can lay hold of Christ by a mere act of his own will?

Just as to trust in the Lord with all his heart, to be anxious for nothing, to let the morrow take care of its own concerns, is the *desire* of every Christian, but “*how* to perform that which is good” he “finds not” (Rom 7:18), until the Holy Spirit is pleased to graciously grant the needed enablement. The one supreme yearning of the awakened and convicted sinner is to lay hold of Christ, but until the Spirit draws him *to* Christ, he finds he has no power to go out of himself, no ability to embrace what is proffered him in the gospel. The fact is, my reader, that the heart of a sinner is as naturally indisposed for loving and appropriating the things of God, as the wood that Elijah laid on the altar was to ignite when he had poured so much water upon it as not

only to saturate the wood, but also to fill the trench round about it (1Ki 18:33)—a *miracle* is required for the one as much as it was for the other.

The fact is that if souls were left to themselves—to their own “free will”—after they had been truly convicted of sin, *none* would ever savingly come to Christ! A further and distinct operation of the Spirit is still needed to actually “draw” the heart to close with Christ Himself. Were the sinner left to himself, he would sink in abject despair; he would fall victim to the malice of Satan. The devil is far more powerful than we are, and never is his rage more stirred than when he fears he is about to lose one of his captives (see Mark 9:20). But blessed be His name, the Spirit does not desert the soul when His work is only half done: He Who is “the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2) to quicken the dead, He Who is “the Spirit of truth” (Joh 16:13) to instruct the ignorant, is also “the Spirit of *faith*” (2Co 4:13) to enable us to savingly believe.

How the Spirit Comforts

And *how* does the Spirit work faith in the convicted sinner’s heart? By effectually testifying to him of the sufficiency of Christ for his every need; by assuring him of the Savior’s readiness to receive the vilest who come to Him. He effectually teaches him that no good qualifications need to be sought, no righteous acts performed, no penance endured in order to fit us for Christ. He reveals to the soul that conviction of sin, deep repenting, a sense of our utter helplessness, are *not* grounds of acceptance with Christ, but simply a consciousness of our spiritual wretchedness, rendering relief in a way of *grace* truly welcome. Repentance is needful not as inducing Christ to give, but as disposing us to receive. The Spirit moves us to come to Christ in the very character in which alone He receives sinners—as vile, ruined, lost. Thus, from start to finish “Salvation is *of the Lord*” (Jon 2:9)—of the Father in ordaining it, of the Son in purchasing it, *of the Spirit* in applying it.

7. The Spirit Drawing

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”—John 6:44

As the Christian now loves God “because he *first* loved” him (1Jo 4:19), so he sought Christ because Christ first sought him (Luk 19:10). Before Christ seeks us, we are well content to lie fast asleep in the devil’s arms, and therefore does the Lord say, “I am found of them that *sought me not*” (Isa 65: 1). When the Spirit first applies the Word of conviction, He finds the souls of all men as the angel found the world in Zechariah 1:11: “all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.” What a strange silence and midnight stillness there is among the unsaved! “There is *none* that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11).

It is because of failure to perceive the dreadful condition in which the natural man lies, that difficulty is experienced in seeing the imperative need for the Spirit’s drawing

power if he is to be brought out of it. The natural man is so completely enslaved by sin and enchained by Satan that he is unable to take the first step toward Christ. He is so bent on having his own way and so averse to pleasing God, he is so *in love* with the things of this world and so out of love with holiness, that nothing short of Omnipotence can produce a radical *change of heart* in him, so that he will come to hate the things he naturally loved, and love what he previously hated. The Spirit's "drawing" is the freeing of the mind, the affections, and the will from the reigning power of depravity; it is His emancipating of the soul from the dominion of sin and Satan.

Prior to that deliverance, when the requirements of God are pressed upon the sinner, he in every case *rejects* them. It is not that he is averse from being saved from hell, for none desire to go there, but that he is unwilling to "forsake" (Pro 28:13; Isa 55:7) his idols—the things which hold the first place in his affections and interests. This is clearly brought out in our Lord's parable of "The Great Supper." When the call went forth, "Come for all things are now ready," we are told, "they *all* with one consent began to make excuse" (Luk 14:18). The meaning of that term "excuse" is explained in what immediately follows: they *preferred* other things, they were *unwilling to deny* themselves, they *would not relinquish* the competitive objects—the things of time and sense ("a piece of ground," "oxen," "a wife") were their all-absorbing concerns.

Had nothing more been done by "the servant," [which] in this parable [is] the Holy Spirit—all had *continued* to "make excuse" unto the end: that is, all had gone on cherishing their idols, and turning a deaf ear to the holy claims of God. But the Servant was commissioned to "bring in hither" (Luk 14:21), yea, to "*compel* them to come in" (v. 23). It is a holy compulsion and not physical force which is there in view: the melting of the hard heart, the wooing and winning of the soul to Christ, the bestowing of faith, the imparting of a new nature—so that the hitherto despised One is now desired and sought after, "I *drew* them with cords of a man [using means and motives suited to a rational nature], with *bands of love*" (Hos 11:4). And again, God says of His people, "with *loving-kindness have I drawn thee*" (Jer 31:3).

8. The Spirit Working Faith

*"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace
in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through
the power of the Holy Ghost."—Romans 15:13*

The principal bond of union between Christ and His people is the Holy Spirit; but as the union is mutual, something is necessary on our part to complete it, and this is *faith*. Hence, Christ is said to dwell in our hearts "by faith" (Eph 3:17). Yet let it be said emphatically, the faith that unites to Christ and saves the soul is not merely a natural act of the mind assenting to the gospel, as it assents to any other truth upon reliable testimony, but is a *supernatural* act, an effect produced by the power of the Spirit of

grace, and is such a persuasion of the truth concerning the Savior as calls forth exercises suited to its Object. The soul being quickened and made alive spiritually, begins to act spiritually, “The soul is the life of the body, faith is the life of the soul, and Christ is the life of faith” (John Flavel).²¹

Saving faith is a cordial approbation of Christ, an acceptance of Him in His entire character as Prophet, Priest, and King; it is entering into covenant with Him, receiving Him as Lord and Savior. When this is understood, it will appear to be a fit instrument for completing our union with Christ, for the union is thus formed by *mutual* consent.

Were people to perceive more clearly the implications and the precise character of saving faith, they would be the more readily convinced that it is “the gift of God,” an effect or fruit of the Spirit’s operations on the heart. Saving faith is a coming to Christ, and coming to Christ necessarily presupposes a forsaking of all that stands opposed to Him. It has been rightly said that “true faith includes in it the renunciation of the flesh as well as the reception of the Savior; true faith admires the precepts of holiness as well as the glory of the Savior” (J. H. Thornwell,²² 1850). Not until these facts are recognized, enlarged upon, and emphasized by present-day preachers is there any real likelihood of the effectual exposure of the utter inadequacy of that *natural* “faith” which is all that thousands of empty professors possess.

Saving Faith Is the Work of the Spirit

“Now he which *stablisheth* us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God” (2Co 1:21). None but God (by His Spirit) can “stablish” the soul in all its parts—the understanding, the conscience, the affections, the will. The ground and reason why the Christian believes the Holy Scriptures to be the Word of God is neither the testimony nor the authority of the church (as Rome erroneously teaches), but rather the testimony and power of the Holy Spirit. Men may present arguments that will so convince the intellect as to cause a consent—but establish the soul and conscience so as to assure the heart of the divine authorship of the Bible, they cannot. A spiritual faith must be imparted before the Word is made, in a *spiritual way*, its foundation and warrant.

In those in whom the Spirit works faith, He first blows down the building of human pretensions, demolishes the walls that were built with the untempered mortar of man’s own righteousness, and destroys the foundations that were laid in self-flattery and natural sufficiency, so that they are entirely shut up to Christ and God’s *free grace*.

²¹ **John Flavel** (c. 1630-1691) – English Presbyterian and minister at Dartmouth, Devonshire, England. Voluminous writer of evangelical works such as *The Fountain of Life Opened* (excerpt available from Chapel Library) and *Keeping the Heart*. Born at Bromagrove, Worcester.

²² **James Henley Thornwell** (1812-1862): American Presbyterian preacher and religious writer born in South Carolina. He pastored Waxhaw Presbyterian Church and became prominent in the Old School Presbyterian denomination in the South, preaching and writing on theological and social issues.

Once awakened, instead of fondly imagining I am the man whom God will save, I am now convinced that I am the one who must be damned. So far from concluding I have any ability to even help save myself, I now *know* that I am “without strength” and no more able to receive Christ as my Lord and Savior than I can climb up to heaven. Evident it is, then, that a mighty supernatural power is needed if I am to come to Him Who “justifieth the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). None but the all-mighty Spirit can lift a stricken soul out of the gulf of despair and enable him to believe to the saving of his soul.

To God the Holy Spirit be the glory of His sovereign grace in working faith in the heart of the writer and of each Christian reader. You have attained peace and joy in believing, but have you thanked that peace-bringer, “the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13)? All that “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8) and that peace which “passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7)—to whom is it ascribed? The *Holy Spirit*. It is particularly appropriated to Him: “peace and joy in the *Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17; *see also* 1Th 1:6). Then render unto Him the praise that is His due.

