

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS WORK IN SALVATION

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The words of “Just as I Am” are as familiar to most Baptists as the lyrics of the “Star Spangled Banner” are to most Americans. Generations have responded to those words and those of the dozen or so other sacred hymns that accompany a part of worship known as the invitation. Likely the pastor will lead the respondent to pray the simple words of the sinner’s prayer hoping and believing that the words are a genuine expression of confession, conviction, repentance and faith. In the familiar Christian vernacular what happened was that someone just got “saved.” However the simplicity of the words of the prayer or the call of the hymn to respond in simple faith, that moment marks the most significant event of a human life—the day of their second birth.

Often the testimony of one’s salvation experience is limited to how God took care of a sin problem that brought new life offered through Jesus Christ. Where that leads is to a view of the salvation experience that is man-centered, devoid of the recognition that something greater than the sinner’s prayer was involved. What is missing is the work of the divine, a work of God as the Trinity especially brought about through the agency of its third person: the Holy Spirit.

In many Baptist churches the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is neglected. A reticence to speak of the Spirit exists because of the overemphasis given in the charismatic or spiritualized circles of Christianity. Attempting to thwart this unbalanced approach to the Spirit, especially in relation to tongues and other spiritual practices, many churches become equally unbalanced and remain tacit on all things pneumatological. This is unfortunate since the Spirit is God, “the Lord, and giver of life” as the Nicene Creed states. He is part of the Trinity, which is wholly at work in the churches. The Spirit’s activity is a large part of God’s work within believers and churches. Beginning at Pentecost, the Spirit empowered the earliest churches and continues to do so. On an individual level, it is the Spirit who works in humans to bring about and guarantee his salvation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Spirit’s work in soteriology. Substance will be given to the broader aspects of both salvation and pneumatology, but the major portion of the paper will discuss the specific work of the Spirit in salvation.

PRELIMINARY CONCERNS

The doctrine of salvation is understandably one of the most important doctrines since it concerns humankind’s redemption. The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BF&M) lists it after Scripture, God, and Man,

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Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.²

The *BF&M* highlights four areas of salvation: Regeneration, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification. Yet in its discussion among theologians these “graces,” or phases of salvation, are often given more extensive treatment. This is in part because of a variety of biblical terms pertaining to salvation. Often theologians present an arrangement of these graces into a logical order in salvation (*ordo salutis*) in hopes to understand better the mystery of salvation.³ However, these lists need not be so extensive, nor should non-biblical paradigms become tests for fellowship. Malcolm Yarnell notices, “There is no uniform agreement concerning the phases of grace.” He believes that these phases are part of one unit wherein “the Spirit exercises both ‘awakening influence’ and ‘convicting influence’ among sinners. He [the Spirit] calls all to salvation through the preaching of the Word.”⁴ What needs to be noticed from these different approaches is not the diversity between them, but rather the unity each sees in salvation itself. From foreknowledge to glorification everything is in relation to the one event of salvation. This unity in salvation is as the *BF&M* says, “In Jesus Christ as Lord,” or union with Christ.

In Romans 8:1 Paul states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”⁵ This verse presents the core of the unity of salvation, which is “those who are *in* Christ Jesus.” The language of being “in Christ” is prominent throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom 3:24; 6:11, 23; 1 Cor 1:2; 15:19; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:19; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10, etc.). John Murray states, “Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.”⁶ If we are going to study salvation we must understand that from beginning to end salvation is a unified whole, describing believers’ union with Christ.⁷

²*Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*, Art. IV.

³For an example see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 670.

⁴Malcolm Yarnell, “The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 671.

⁵Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

⁶John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

⁷cf. Kenneth Keathley, “The Work of God: Salvation” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 687–696; Grudem, 840–850.

This doctrine is closely related to the Holy Spirit, for in verses 10–11 Paul claims, “if Christ is in you, . . . the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” An understanding of union with Christ in salvation needs to be seen as a work of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ with whom Christians are united, but it is by means of the Holy Spirit that this union occurs.

THE PERSON OF THE SPIRIT IN SALVATION

Triune Personhood

The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation should not be considered apart from an understanding of the person of the Spirit and his relation to the Trinity. Bruce Ware asks the question, “Can the Christian faith survive, as it were, if the doctrine of the Trinity is omitted?” The answer he provides is that “The doctrine of the Trinity is both *central and necessary for the Christian faith* to be what it is. Remove the Trinity, and the whole Christian faith disintegrates.”⁸ Also seeing the Trinity’s importance Karl Rahner comments on a common deficiency: “It is as though this mystery has been revealed for its own sake, and that even after it has been made known to us, it remains, *as a reality*, locked up within itself.”⁹ Seeing that there needs to be a relationship between man and this doctrine, Rahner presented his famous axiom: “*The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.*”¹⁰ This means that to understand the Trinity one need only look to the works of God in the world. This is especially important to the understanding of the Spirit in salvation. To know how he works as God in salvation it is necessary to understand who he is as God.

Coequal Personhood

The first place the Bible mentions the Spirit in relation to the Trinity is at the Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–10; Luke 3:21–22). Depicted at his baptism all three persons are represented, the Son is baptized, the Father speaks, and the Spirit descends and rests upon the Son. The Spirit here is seen as the agent of God who will empower the work of Christ. This agency is not limited to his ministry to the Son. In John 15 the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son (cf. John 20:22–23) and in chapter 16 the Spirit gives glory to the Son. However, this is not an ontological subordination of the Spirit. In the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) Christians are commanded to baptize in the name of all three members of the Trinity, thus treating them as co-equals. In Second Corinthians 13:14 Paul offers a benediction in all three members of the Trinity attributing different functions to them, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the

⁸Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 16, emphasis his.

⁹Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, *Milestones in Catholic Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 14 emphasis his.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

holy Spirit be with you all.” Here the Spirit is seen as the fellowship, or the binding agent of the Trinity. In 1 Peter 1:2 the Spirit is again seen working alongside the Father and the Son functioning as the sanctifier of humankind. From these passages we can affirm that the Spirit is God, is equal to God, yet is distinct *only* in his function, and operates as an agent of God. Thus, God the Holy Spirit, the agent of God, is integral to the work of applying salvation.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN SALVATION

The Spirit as the agent of God is the person of the Trinity who empowers its work. He empowered Christ during his earthly ministry and now empowers the churches in their earthly ministry. His empowering presence is seen particularly in the phases of salvation. This section will give separate treatment to each phase of the Spirit’s work in salvation, however it should be noted that even though the phases are presented separately and in a seemingly chronological order their application is not necessarily applied to the believer apart from one another. Hence, one should keep in mind the unity of salvation in union with Christ mentioned above. Also, not every part of salvation is mentioned in what follows; only those phases of salvation that are expressly due to the agency of the Spirit are discussed. For instance, one will note a lack of a discussion on foreknowledge and election. This is because even though these topics are important in salvation they are primarily a work of the Father and not of the Spirit. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that it is God the Trinity who works salvation. Any emphasis of one phase or person over another in salvation leads to, at minimum, an inadequate view of God’s saving work. Thus, we begin our look at the Spirit’s role in salvation by seeing his inspiration of the Scriptures.

Inspiration

In quoting Joel 2:32 Paul reiterates the Old Testament prophet’s means of salvation, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 1:13). Here he clarifies the means by which people are able to call upon the name of the Lord: “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (v. 14). He summarizes this method of salvation in verse 17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” From this short passage the basis for salvation is laid: the proclamation of the Word.

The inspiration resident in the Word, or the Bible, is the primary act of the Spirit in salvation since it is the object of proclamation. There is not a part of it that has not been acted on by the Spirit. Second Peter 1:21 states that the Holy Spirit directed the writing of Scripture. In First Thessalonians 1:5 the gospel is presented “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.” Since the Word has been written with the Spirit and proclaimed in the Spirit, Scripture is intimately interlinked to the Spirit.

In short, the Bible is inspired. Second Timothy 3:16 claims “all Scripture is breathed out by God.” The various opinions on the means of inspiration are not in the scope of this discussion, rather it is important to notice *that* the Spirit is the divine agent involved in Scripture’s inspiration. L. Russ Bush says that “inspiration is the work of God’s Spirit that

guarantees the accurate recording of the content of divine revelation and the truthful description of the circumstances in which it came.”¹¹ To make the claim for inspiration of Scripture is to claim that God actively involved himself in it and that involvement is by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

One of the reasons the Spirit can inspire Scripture and make it truthful is that he is ‘the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:17). As such, anything that comes from the Spirit is true and authoritative. John further clarifies the giving of this truth in 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.” As the agent of God, sent by the Father and the Son, the Spirit brings all truth. This truth is contained in the Bible and as such is not only the authoritative revelation from God but also the beginning work of the Spirit in salvation. In this work of guiding into all truth the Spirit is not limited to the writing of Scripture, but also to its interpretation, known as illumination.¹²

Illumination

Illumination can be defined simply as the witness of the Spirit in the Bible. In order for the truth of a biblical text to become clear to a reader there must be an act of the Spirit involved in its reading. Erickson lists three reasons why humans need illumination when coming to Scripture. First, God is transcendent; second, Man is sinful; and third, humans need certainty in divine matters.¹³ In First Corinthians Paul makes the argument that “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18). When the world hears the message of Scripture it scoffs. This is in part because those in the world have no part in the Spirit and cannot receive him. Apart from the Spirit Scripture is less than clear. This is not to mean non-believers cannot propositionally understand the Bible, rather it means that they cannot understand it to the point of saving belief. A work of illuminating the text by the Spirit is necessary for salvation.

An example of this is the Road to Emmaus discourse in Luke 24. After Jesus’ resurrection he was speaking to two of his disciples who were confused about the reports of

¹¹L. Russ Bush, “Understanding Biblical Inerrancy,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50 (Fall 2007), 28. Herman Bavinck rightly notes, “Holy Scripture nowhere offers a clearly formulated dogma of inspiration. . . . [Scripture] contains and teaches the God-breathed character of Scripture in the same sense and in the same way . . . as the dogma of the Trinity, the incarnation, vicarious atonement etc.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 422–23; See also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 224–245; David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson, “Special Revelation” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 141–162; Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 85–140; Grudem, 73–89.

¹²Erickson, 276.

¹³Ibid., 273.

him being alive. He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (vv. 25–27). It is probable these men knew the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, yet they did not understand the message contained within apart from God showing it to them. The same is true for any person desiring to know truth; the Spirit must have an active part in illumining Scripture for saving truth to be found. This is what Paul means in First Corinthians 2:12, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

Both inspiration and illumination are the basis for salvation because, as mentioned above, salvation must come through preaching (Rom 10). Before any preacher begins a message, the chosen text of Scripture has already been an act of the Spirit through inspiration, and the means of understanding the truth of that message is the continuation of that act of the Spirit through illumination. Before any specific call to salvation is given the means of that call, the preaching of the word of Christ, has been an act accomplished by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Calling

Since the Spirit’s work of inspiration and illumination of the Bible is the foundation for salvation, the call to salvation comes from it. Second Thessalonians 2:14 presents the call occurring through the gospel. However, the terminology of “calling” is seemingly ambiguous. At some points the Bible depicts a calling that is general and able to be rejected. Matthew 11:28 is a call Jesus gives after mentioning that the Son chooses for whom he will reveal the Father, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Yet in other texts it seems to present an effective call. Romans 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” This ambiguity of calling has led some scholars to create different types of calling such as a gospel call, an external call, and an internal call, all of which are distinct from one another.¹⁴ However, it might be better to understand these not as distinct types of calls but different aspects of the same call. Keathley sees that “God calls externally through communication of the Word of God and internally as the Holy Spirit speaks inwardly to those who hear that communication. The external and internal calls operate together to deliver salvation to everyone who repents and believes.”¹⁵ This is a better way to understand calling, especially in light of the Holy Spirit’s unified work of calling.

When the specific call is given through the preacher of the Word of Christ, the Spirit’s primary act is that of conviction. In John 16:8 Jesus says, “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” This conviction results in one of two ways. Either one hears the Word, is convicted, repents, and believes,

¹⁴Grudem, 693.

¹⁵Keathley, 723.

thus taking the blessing of salvation, or one hears the Word, is convicted, and turns away, thus enacting the just curse of damnation.

Conversion

What naturally comes out of the call to salvation is the conversion of the believer. Luke presents us with this means of salvation in Acts 2 after Peter preached his Pentecost Sermon. “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?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (vv. 37–38). Notice that prior to this, Peter’s sermon was based on inspired Scripture (Joel 2:28–32; Ps 16:8–11; 110:1), by which it illumined those who heard it since “they were cut to the heart.” Since verse 41 tells us that three thousand souls were added that day, it is evident this call was answered. Yet, the call was a call *to* conversion wherein the hearers of the call must *respond* with repentance by which God will grant to them the Spirit. Conversion is the beginning of salvation for the hearer of the call given through the preaching of the Spirit-inspired Word.

Faith and Repentance

Whereas the Acts 2 passage depicts conversion, it only shows one aspect of conversion: Repentance. There is another part of conversion that occurs simultaneously: Faith. “Repentance is the unbeliever turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ.”¹⁶ The act of turning from sin toward Christ is an act of the believer in an intellectual and a volitional way. The focus of John 3:16 and 36 is on the belief of the individual. In chapter 11 Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” In Romans 5:1 justification comes by faith, and in Ephesians 2:8 Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” However we must not see faith as *only* an act of humans, for verse eight continues, “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” There is a divine aspect to repentance and faith as well. If it were not so it would be impossible to come to God.

We need to remember, however, that salvation is not to be viewed in parts, but holistically. The ability to have faith, to turn from sin toward Christ, is based upon the call illumined by the Spirit through the inspired Word. Whereas it might appear that faith supplied apart from the Spirit’s previous work (either from an act within man or from God), it only confuses that work of the Spirit on the believer. Repentance and faith are part of salvation wrought through the agency of the Spirit’s call to hearers of the Word. With the believer’s response of repentance and faith conversion occurs and, as Acts 2 says, the believers “will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁶Erickson, 946, 951–954. cf. Grudem, 709–721; Keathley, 728–739.

Regeneration

If conversion is the human side to the individual's new beginning in salvation, then regeneration is the divine side of that act wherein the Holy Spirit is given to the individual (cf. Gal 3:3). Article IV.A of the *BF&M* defines it as:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.¹⁷

The Bible depicts regeneration through a variety of images that separately give a larger picture of the work of regeneration.¹⁸

Indwelling

First, the Spirit indwells the believer. In Ezekiel 11 God's future salvation is prophesied, "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them." Ezekiel repeats this line in chapter 36 and adds to it, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (v. 27). The future salvation that is prophesied here is enacted by the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer. Notice from these verses that this indwelling naturally leads to a relationship with God in the covenantal formula, "you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (v. 28). This ability to have that righteous relationship is impossible apart from the Spirit's indwelling.

In the New Testament this is seen in 1 Corinthians where the Spirit is dwelling in believers, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (3:16; cf. 6:19). In Romans 5 the love of God is poured into us through the Spirit (v. 5). Second Timothy 2:14 also says that the Spirit dwells in us and in First Peter 4:14 the Spirit "rests upon" us. It is the picture that Jesus gives in calling himself the vine and believers the branches (John 15; cf. the marriage imagery of Eph 5). Even though these passages may use slightly different language ("in" or "on") the meaning is the same: At conversion the Spirit is given to dwell within a believer. As will be seen, this indwelling becomes a particular means for other phases of salvation.

¹⁷*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, IV. A.

¹⁸For more discussion on regeneration see Erickson, 955–58; Grudem, 699–708; Keathley, 739–45; Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 582–83.

New Life

Second, regeneration brings about new life as seen in Ezekiel above. It is also found in the discourse with Nicodemus in John 3 where Jesus says one must be “born again.” This rebirth is “of the Spirit” (v. 8) and gives the believer new life (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3; 1 John 1:29). In John 6 Jesus again shows this new life to come by the agency of the Spirit: “It is the Spirit who gives life” (v. 63). Paul presents this new life in Romans. As he discusses the relationship between flesh and spirit he says, “But if Christ is in you, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in you” (8:10–11; cf. 13).

Seal

Finally, in regeneration the Spirit seals the believer. The terminology of “sealing” is biblically represented with a few different terms. It incorporates the ideas of “first fruits” (Rom 8:28), “seal” (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 3:30), “guarantee” (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5), and a “letter of recommendation” (2 Cor 3:3). The sealing of the Spirit in a believer is closely related to the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer. If union with Christ is the broadest understanding of what salvation is, then indwelling marks the beginning of salvation and sealing points to the end of salvation. The terms presented above utilize the concept of the Spirit as a down payment of what is to come. In First Peter 1:4 our salvation is said to be “an inheritance . . . kept in heaven.” Those who will receive the inheritance at the end are those who receive the Spirit now. Moreover, the sealing of the Spirit provides assurance of faith. In Second Corinthians 1:20–22 Paul assures his readers that the promises of God will be fulfilled because they are found in Christ and are known because the giving of the Spirit acts as a guarantee that the promises of God will come true.

Justification

One of the most emphasized parts of salvation is justification. In the Reformation justification by faith alone was a core issue. The *BFC&M* defines justification as:

God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.¹⁹

The core concept of justification has to do with righteousness. In Romans 5 we are seen as being completely unrighteous because of Adam’s sin, but through Christ we find salvation: “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (v. 18). Justification is seen as our standing before the Father and might not be seen as an activity of the Spirit; however, the Spirit still functions as the agent of the Trinity even in Justification. In First Corinthians 6:11 the entire Trinity is seen working in salvation including justification. As it is the inheritance of God’s kingdom that is in question, Paul claims it is given to those who were washed, sanctified, and

¹⁹*Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*, Art. IV. B.

“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Keathley points out that “to be justified by God a person must be either (1) *found* righteous, (2) *made* righteous, or (3) *declared* righteous.”²⁰ In assessment of these three views Keathley rightly sees that justification only comes by being declared righteous.²¹ This declaration is immediate and occurs at conversion along with regeneration and sanctification. Although the Spirit’s role in justification is not as prominent as it is with regeneration and sanctification 1 Corinthians 6:11 makes it clear that the Spirit is active in it.

Sanctification

When believers have been unified with Christ, not only do they receive regeneration and justification, but also sanctification. Because we have been declared justified with the indwelt Spirit, we are imparted the holiness of God by the Spirit. The *BF&M* states that

sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life.²²

From this definition we see sanctification applied at the beginning of salvation and continuing on throughout the believer’s life. The biblical texts that concern sanctification present it as both a completed action and a continuing process. W. T. Conner comments on Paul’s usage of sanctification: “Paul’s predominant use of the verb to sanctify and the noun sanctification is with reference to the initiation of the Christian life. But he also uses these with reference to ethical purity on the part of the Christian in his daily life.”²³ Thus, sanctification is both positional and experiential.²⁴

The positional, or completed action, aspect of sanctification appears especially in First Corinthians. In 1:2 Paul’s address is to those “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The believers who receive the letter are not declared as those being sanctified, but as those who are sanctified. Paul expresses this positional element again in 6:11, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” From these texts it is clear that a completed act of sanctification has occurred. This action is because of the union with Christ acted by the indwelling Spirit in the believer. However, a tension arises when the believer continues to sin and mars the holiness given to

²⁰Keathley, 746 italics his.

²¹See *Ibid.*, 746–753.

²²*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Art. IV. C.

²³W. T. Conner, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Treatment of the Biblical Doctrine of the Divine Spirit* (Nashville: Broadman, 1940), 114.

²⁴Keathley, 758–59; cf. Erickson, 983–86; Grudem, 746–62.

them. This is where the experiential aspect of sanctification begins. Keathley relates the two, “Our positional sanctification enables our experiential sanctification.”²⁵

Not only are believers made holy; also they are *being* made holy. Peter had this in mind when he quoted Leviticus in his first letter, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16). Even though the believers’ aim is to be holy, it should be recognized that this task cannot be completed on earth. First John 1:8 claims that “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Because of continual sin, perfectionism on earth, which is completed holiness, must be denied. The experiential sanctification of the believer is the act of the Spirit that continues to guide him to more and more likeness to Christ.

The means through which we are to obtain this experiential holiness is a work of the Spirit. In John 16 Jesus tells the apostles that when the Spirit comes “he will guide you into all truth.” As mentioned above, illumination is one of the main functions of the Spirit. When the Bible is preached the Spirit not only calls those into salvation, but guides believers through the experience of sanctification. Romans 8 is the premier chapter on the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The overall message Paul gives is to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit” over against the things of the flesh (v. 5).

Galatians 5 also mentions experiential sanctification. In this passage the believer is to live according to the Spirit and in doing so will effectively put away the desires of the flesh: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh” (v.17). In verses 19–24 Paul provides examples of how those in the flesh and those in the Spirit live and he exhorts believers to live by the Spirit’s fruit. We need to live a lifestyle that is submissive to the indwelling Spirit. Paul speaks to this in Philippians 2:12–13, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” This passage does not imply a works-based salvation, but an experiential sanctification whereby we are constantly subjecting ourselves to the indwelt Holy Spirit.

Glorification

When this life ends and the believer is able to gain that inheritance of which the Spirit is a down payment, the final stage of salvation occurs. We call this final stage glorification. The *BF&M* defines it as “the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.” This is where the salvific work of the Spirit comes to a climax by finally completing the experiential sanctification begun at conversion.

CONCLUSION

Since all believers experience salvation it is a subject that needs to be rightly understood. The often-highlighted human experience and testimony of salvation should not be minimized, but additions need to be made to the common presentation of salvation. The

²⁵Ibid., 759.

work of salvation is a work of the Trinity especially seen in its economic relationship to Godself and to the created world. The Father may have foreknowledge, the Spirit may be making believers holy, and the blood of Jesus may bring obedience (cf. 1 Pet 1:2), but it is God who saves. The Spirit's works on earth and in us are in tandem with the works of the Son in whom all believers are unified. Given that importance, those works need not be neglected or relegated to other persons of the Trinity. Our churches need to cease neglecting the Spirit's work or limiting his work to a few gifts. The gift of the Spirit is himself indwelling those who heed his call, applying to them their justification and sanctifying them as holy beings in order to prepare them for the inheritance to come.