

# *The Sovereignty of God the Holy Spirit in Salvation*

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## **THE MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Since the Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity, it necessarily follows that He is in full sympathy with the will and design of the other Persons of the Godhead. The eternal purpose of the Father in election, the limited design in the death of the Son, and the restricted scope of the Holy Spirit's operations are in perfect accord. If the Father chose certain ones before the foundation of the world and gave them to His Son, and if it was for them that Christ gave Himself a ransom, then the Holy Spirit is not now working to "bring the world to Christ." The mission of the Holy Spirit in the world today is to apply the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. The question which is now to engage us is not the extent of the Holy Spirit's power—on that point there can be no doubt, it is infinite—but what we shall seek to show is that His power and operations are directed by Divine wisdom and sovereignty.

## **DIRECTED BY DIVINE WISDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY**

We have just said that the power and operations of the Holy Spirit are directed by Divine wisdom and indisputable sovereignty. In proof of this assertion we appeal first to our Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3: 8—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." A comparison is here drawn between the wind and the Spirit. The comparison is a double one: first, both are sovereign in their actions, and second, both are mysterious in their operations. The comparison is pointed out in the word so. The first point of analogy is seen in the words "where it listeth" or "pleaseth"; the second is found in the words "canst not tell." With the second point of analogy we are not now concerned, but upon the first we would comment further.

## **AN ANALOGY TO THE WIND**

"The wind bloweth where it pleaseth ... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is an element which man can neither harness nor hinder. The wind neither consults man's pleasure nor can it be regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows when it pleases, where it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit. The wind is regulated by Divine wisdom, yet so far as man is concerned, it is absolutely sovereign in its operations. So it is with the Spirit. Sometimes the wind blows so softly it scarcely rustles a leaf; at other times it blows so loudly that its roar can be heard for miles. So it is in the matter of the new birth; with some the Holy Spirit deals so gently, that His work is imperceptible to human onlookers; with others His action is so powerful, radical, revolutionary, that His operations are patent to many. Sometimes the wind is purely local in its reach, at other times widespread in its scope. So it is with the Spirit: today He acts on one or two souls, tomorrow He may, as at Pentecost, "prick in the heart" a whole multitude. But whether He works on few or many, He consults not man. He acts as He pleases. The new birth is due to the sovereign will of the Spirit.

Each of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity is concerned with our salvation: with the Father it is predestination; with the Son propitiation; with the Spirit regeneration. The Father chose us; the Son died for us; the Spirit quickens us. The Father was concerned about us; the Son shed His blood for us, the Spirit performs His work within us. It is with the work of the Spirit we are now concerned, with His work in the new birth, and particularly His sovereign operations in the new birth. The Father purposed our new birth;

the Son has made possible (by His "travail") the new birth; but it is the Spirit who effects the new birth—"Born of the Spirit" (John 3:6).

### **SOLELY THE WORK OF GOD THE SPIRIT**

The new birth is solely the work of God the Spirit and man has no part or lot in causing it. This from the very nature of the case. Birth altogether excludes the idea of any effort or work on the part of the one who is born. Personally we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our natural birth. The new birth is a spiritual resurrection, a "passing from death unto life" (John 5:24), and clearly, resurrection is altogether outside of man's province. No corpse can re-animate itself. Hence it is written, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). But the Spirit does not "quicken" everybody—why? The usual answer returned to this question is, Because everybody does not trust in Christ. It is supposed that the Holy Spirit quickens only those who believe. But this is to put the cart before the horse. Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. Faith (in God) is an exotic, something that is not native to the human heart. If faith were a natural product of the human heart, the exercise of a principle common to human nature, it would never have been written, "All men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2). Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead—"dead in trespasses and sins"—then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8)—but they could if it were possible for the flesh to believe. Compare with this last-quoted scripture Heb. 11:6—"But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Can God be "pleased" or satisfied with any thing which does not have its origin in Himself?

### **THE NEW BIRTH PRECEDES OUR BELIEVING**

That the work of the Holy Spirit precedes our believing is unequivocally established by 2 Thess. 2:13—"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Note that sanctification of the Spirit comes before and makes possible—"belief of the truth." What then is the "sanctification of the Spirit"? We answer, the new birth. In Scripture "sanctification" always means "separation," separation from something and unto something or someone. Let us now amplify our assertion that the "sanctification of the Spirit" corresponds to the new birth and points to the positional effect of it.

### **THE NEW BIRTH SEPARATES THE**

#### **BELIEVER**

Here is a servant of God who preaches the Gospel to a congregation in which are an hundred unsaved people. He brings before them the teaching of Scripture concerning their ruined and lost condition; he speaks of God, His character and righteous demands; he tells of Christ meeting God's demands, and dying the Just for the unjust, and declares that through "this Man" is now preached the forgiveness of sins; he closes by urging the lost to believe what God has said in His Word and receive His Word and receive His Son as their own personal Savior. The meeting is over; the congregation disperses; ninety-nine of the unsaved have refused to come to Christ that they might have life, and go out into the night having no hope, and without God in the world. But the hundredth hears the Word of life; the Seed sown falls into ground which has been prepared by God; he believes the Good News, and goes home rejoicing that his name is written in heaven. He has been "born again," and just as a newly born babe in the natural world begins life by clinging instinctively, in its helplessness, to its mother, so this new-born soul has clung to Christ, Just as we read, "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia "that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14), so in the case supposed above, the Holy Spirit quickened that one before he believed

the Gospel message. Here then is the "sanctification of the Spirit": this one soul who has been born again has, by virtue of his new birth, been separated from the other ninety-nine. Those born again are, by the Spirit, set apart from those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

### **THOSE SEPARATED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN**

To return to 2 Thess. 2:13: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The order of thought here is most important and instructive. First, God's eternal choice; second, the sanctification of the Spirit; third, belief of the truth. Precisely the same order is found in I Pet. 1:2—"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We take it that the "obedience" here is the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5), which appropriates the virtues of the sprinkled blood of the Lord Jesus. So then before the "obedience" (of faith, cf. Heb. 5:9), there is the work of the Spirit setting us apart, and behind that is the election of God the Father. The ones "sanctified of the Spirit" then, are they whom "God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation" (Thess. 2:13), those who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter 1:2).

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operations and His saving mission is confined to God's elect: they are the ones He "comforts," "if seals," guides into all truth, and shows things to come. The work of the Spirit is necessary to the complete accomplishment of the Father's eternal purpose. To speak hypothetically but reverently, if God had done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners, not a single sinner would ever have been saved. In order for any sinner to see his need of a Savior and be willing to receive the Savior he needs, the work of the Holy Spirit upon and within him is imperatively required. Had God done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners and then sent forth His servants to proclaim salvation through Christ, leaving sinners entirely to themselves to accept or reject as they pleased, then every sinner would have rejected, because at heart every man hates God and is at enmity with Him (Rom. 8:7). Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is needed to bring the sinner to Christ, to overcome his innate opposition, and bring him to accept the provision God has made. By nature, God's elect are children of wrath even as others (Eph. 2:3), and as such their hearts are at enmity with God. But this "enmity" of theirs is overcome by the Spirit and it is in consequence of His regenerating work that they believe on Christ. Is it not clear then that the reason why others are left outside the kingdom of God, is not only because they are unwilling to go in, but also because the Holy Spirit has not so dealt with them? Is it not manifest that the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the exercise of His power, that as the wind "bloweth where it pleaseth," so the Holy Spirit operates where He pleases?

And now to sum up, We have sought to show the perfect consistency of God's ways: that each Person in the Godhead acts in sympathy and harmony with the Others. God the Father elected certain ones to salvation, God the Son died for the elect, and God the Spirit quickens the elect. Well may we sing:

*"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him all creatures here below,  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*