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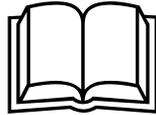
The Holy Spirit

Part II

the Spirit's work in sanctification

A. W. Pink

1937



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Course HS2 Lessons 1-6 (File HS2 1-6)
(13 lessons in total)

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” - Revelation 3:22

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Suggestions...

Each lesson is derived from a chapter in the book entitled *The Holy Spirit* by Arthur W. Pink; this course (HS1) comprises chapters 17 through 31. (This file covers chapters 17 to 22.) Before attempting to answer the questions for each lesson, it is important to read the corresponding chapter in the text.

Some of your responses will come directly from the text. Others will require that you be able to grasp the essential thoughts and principles presented, and then to offer your own answer. Still others are intended to provoke thought and personal application.

In every case, you are *strongly encouraged* to examine everything against the Word of God, and to include such light as the Lord gives you in your responses throughout this course. You cannot employ the Scriptures too often as you formulate your answers.

The assignments for each chapter are divided into two sections: 'Response' and 'Reflection.' In the *Response* section, your answers will come primarily from the text, but please use your own words. The *Reflection* section will ask you to formulate your answers based upon your own conclusions.

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham England in 1886, and born again of the Spirit of God in 1908 at the age of 22. He studied at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA, for only six weeks before beginning his pastoral work in Colorado. From there he pastored churches in California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, before moving to Sydney Australia for a brief period, preaching and teaching. In 1934, at 48 years old, he returned to his native England. He took permanent residence in Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, remaining there 12 years until his death at age 66 in 1952.

Most of his works, including *The Holy Spirit*, first appeared as articles in the monthly *Studies in the Scriptures* published from 1922 to 1953 (and currently republished serially by Chapel Library / Mount Zion Publications). Pink was virtually unknown and certainly unappreciated in his day. Independent Bible study convinced him that much of modern evangelism was defective. When Puritan and reformed books were generally disregarded by the Church as a whole, he advanced the majority of their principles with untiring zeal. The progressive spiritual decline of his own nation (Britain) was to him the inevitable consequence of the prevalence of a 'gospel' that could neither *wound* (with conviction of sin) nor *heal* (via regeneration).

Familiar with the whole range of revelation, Mr. Pink was rarely sidetracked from the great themes of Scripture: grace, justification, and sanctification. Our generation owes him a great debt for the enduring light he has shed, by God's grace, on the Truth of the Holy Bible.

Lesson 3 The Spirit Teaching

19. The Spirit Teaching

Taught of the Spirit

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall *teach you* all things” (John 14:26). Those words received their *first* fulfillment in the men to whom they were immediately addressed—the Apostles were so filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit that their proclamation of the Gospel was without flaw, and their writings without error. Those original ambassadors of Christ were so taught by the Third Person in the Trinity that what they delivered was the very mind of God. The *second* fulfillment of the Savior’s promise has been in those men whom He called to preach His Gospel throughout the Christian era. No new revelations have been made to them, but they were, and are, according to their varied measure, and the particular work assigned to them, so enlightened by the Spirit that the Truth of God has been faithfully preached by them. The *third* and widest application of our Lord’s words are unto the entire Household of Faith, and it is in this sense we shall now consider them.

It is written, “And *all* Thy children shall be taught of the LORD” (Isa. 54:13 and cf. John 6:45). This is one of the great distinguishing marks of the regenerate: all of them are “taught *of the LORD*.” There are multitudes of unregenerate religionists who are taught, numbers of them well taught, in the letter of the Scriptures. They are thoroughly versed in the historical facts and doctrines of Christianity; but their instruction came only from human media—parents, Sunday School teachers, or through reading religious books. Their intellectual knowledge of spiritual things is considerable, sound, and clear; yet is it unaccompanied by any heavenly unction, saving power, or transforming effects. In like manner, there are thousands of preachers who abhor the errors of “Modernists” and who contend earnestly for the Faith. They were taught in Bible Institutes, and theological schools, yet it is to be feared that many of them are total strangers to a *miracle of grace* being wrought in the heart. How it behooves *each of us* to test ourselves rigidly at this point!

It is a common fact of observation—which anyone may test for himself—that a very large percentage of those who constitute the membership of evangelical denominations were first taken there in childhood by their parents. The great majority in the Presbyterian churches today had a father or mother who was a Presbyterian and who instructed the offspring in their beliefs. The same is true of Baptists, the Methodists, and those who are in fellowship at the Brethren assemblies. The present generation has been brought up to believe in the doctrines and religious customs of their ancestors. Now we are far from saying that because a man who is a Presbyterian today had parents and grandparents that were Presbyterians and who taught him the Westminster Catechism, that therefore all the knowledge he possesses of Divine things is but traditional and theoretical. No indeed. Yet we do say that such a training in the letter of the Truth makes it more difficult, and calls for a more careful self-examination, to ascertain whether or not he has been taught *of the Lord*.

Though we do not believe that Grace runs in the blood, yet we are convinced that, *as a general rule*, (having many individual exceptions), God does place His elect in families where at least one of the parents loves and seeks to serve Him, and where that elect soul will be nurtured in the fear and admonition of the Lord. At least three-fourths of those Christians whom the writer has met and had opportunity to question, had a praying and Scripture-reading father or mother. Yet, on the other hand, we are obliged to acknowledge that three-fourths of the empty professors we have encountered also had religious parents, who sent them to Sunday School and sought to have them trained in their beliefs: and these now rest upon their intellectual knowledge of the Truth, and mistake it for *a saving experience* of the same. And it is *this* class which it is the hardest to reach: it is much more difficult to persuade such to *examine themselves* as to whether or not they have been taught *of God*, than it is those who make no profession at all.

Let it not be concluded from what has been pointed out that, where the Holy Spirit teaches a soul, He dispenses with all human instrumentality. Not so. It is true the Spirit is sovereign and therefore works where He pleases and when He pleases. It is also a fact that He is Almighty, tied down to no means, and therefore works as He pleases and how He pleases. Nevertheless, He frequently condescends to employ means, and to use very feeble instruments. In fact, this seems to generally characterize His operations: that He works through men and women, and sometimes through little children. Yet, let it be said emphatically, that no preaching, catechizing or reading produces any vital and spiritual results unless God the Spirit is pleased to bless and apply the same unto the heart of the individual. Thus there are many who have passed from death unto life and been brought to love the Truth under the Spirit's application of a pious parent's or Sunday School teacher's instruction—while there are some who never enjoyed such privileges yet have been truly and deeply taught by God.

Tests for the Spirit's Teaching

From all that has been said above a very pertinent question arises, How may I know whether or not *my* teaching has been by the Holy Spirit? The simple but sufficient answer is, *By the effects produced*. First, that spiritual knowledge which the teaching of the Holy Spirit imparts is an *operative* knowledge. It is not merely a piece of information which adds to our mental store, but is a species of inspiration which stirs the soul into action. "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" (2 Cor. 4:6). The light which the Spirit imparts reaches the heart. It warms the heart, and sets it on fire for God. It masters the heart, and brings it into allegiance to God. It molds the heart, and stamps upon it the image of God. Here, then, is a sure test: how far does the teaching you have received, the knowledge of Divine things you possess, *affect your heart*?

Second, that knowledge which the teaching of the Spirit imparts is a *soul-humbling* knowledge. "Knowledge puffeth up" (1 Cor. 8:1), that is a notional, theoretical, intellectual knowledge which is merely received from men or books in a *natural* way. But that *spiritual* knowledge which comes from God reveals to a man his empty conceits, his ignorance and worthlessness, and abases him. The teaching of the Spirit reveals our sinfulness and vileness, our lack of conformity to Christ, our unholiness; and makes a man little in his own eyes. Among those born of women was not a greater than John the Baptist: wondrous were the privileges granted him, abundant the light he was favored with. What effect had it on him? "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet *I am not worthy* to unloose" (John 1:27). Who was granted such an insight into heavenly things as Paul! Did he herald himself as "The greatest Bible teacher of the age"? No. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). Here, then, is a sure test: how far does the teaching you have received *humble* you?

Third, that knowledge which the teaching of the Holy Spirit imparts is a *world-despising* knowledge. It makes a man have poor, low, mean thoughts of those things which his unregenerate fellows (and which he himself, formerly) so highly esteem. It opens his eyes to see the transitoriness and comparative worthlessness of earthly honors, riches and fame. It makes him perceive that all under the sun is but vanity and vexation of spirit. It brings him to realize that the world is a flatterer, a deceiver, a liar, and a murderer which has fatally deceived the hearts of millions. Where the Spirit reveals eternal things, temporal things are scorned. Those things which once were gain to him, he now counts as loss; yea, as dross and dung (Phil. 3:4-9). The teaching of the Spirit raises the heart high above this poor perishing world. Here is a sure test: does *your* knowledge of spiritual things cause you to hold temporal things with a light hand, and despise those baubles which others hunt so eagerly?

Fourth, the knowledge which the teaching of the Spirit imparts is a *transforming* knowledge. The light of God shows how far, far short we come of the standard Holy Writ reveals, and stirs us unto holy endeavors to lay aside every hindering weight, and run with patience the race set before us. The teaching of the Spirit causes us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Here, then, is a sure test: how far does my knowledge of spiritual things influence my heart, govern my will, and regulate my life? Does increasing light lead to a more tender conscience, more Christ-like character and conduct? If not, it is vain, worthless, and will only add to my condemnation.

The Spirit Applies Knowledge to the Heart

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall *teach you* all things” (John 14:26). How urgently we need a Divine Teacher! A natural and notional knowledge of Divine things may be obtained through men, but a spiritual and experimental knowledge of them can only be communicated by God Himself. I may devote myself to the study of the Scriptures in the same ways as I would to the study of some science or the mastering of a foreign language. By diligent application, persevering effort, and consulting works of reference (commentators, etc.), I may steadily acquire a comprehensive and accurate acquaintance with the letter of God’s Word, and become an able expositor thereof. But I cannot obtain a heart-affecting, a heart-purifying, and a heart-molding knowledge thereof. None but the Spirit of truth can write God’s Law on my heart, stamp God’s image upon my soul, and *sanctify* me by the Truth.

Conscience informs me that I am a sinner; the preacher may convince me that without Christ I am eternally lost; but neither the one nor the other is sufficient to move me to receive Him as my Lord and Savior. One man may lead a horse to the water, but no 10 men can make him drink when he is unwilling to do so. The Lord Jesus Himself was “anointed to preach the Gospel” (Luke 4:18), and did so with a zeal for God’s glory and a compassion for souls such as none other ever had; yet He had to say to His hearers, “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). What a proof is that, that something *more* is required above and beyond the *outward presentation* of the Truth. There must be *the inward application* of it to the heart with Divine power if the will is to be moved. And *that* is what the teaching of the Spirit consists of: it is an effectual communication of the Word which works powerfully *within* the soul.

Why is it that so many professing Christians change their view so easily and quickly? What is the reason there are so many thousands of unstable souls who are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14)? Why is it that this year they sit under a man who preaches the Truth and claim to believe and enjoy his messages; while next year they attend the ministry of a man of error and heartily embrace his opinions? It must be because they were *never taught of the Spirit*. “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it” (Eccl. 3:14). What the Spirit writes on the heart remains: “The anointing which ye have received of Him *abideth in you*” (1 John 2:27), and neither man nor devil can efface it.

Why is it that so many professing Christians are unfruitful? Month after month, year after year, they attend upon the means of grace, and yet remain unchanged. Their store of religious information is greatly increased, their intellectual knowledge of the Truth is much advanced, but their lives are not transformed. There is no denying of self, taking up their cross, and following a despised Christ along the narrow way of personal holiness. There is no humble self-abasement, no mourning over indwelling sin, no mortification of the same. There is no deepening love for Christ, evidenced by a running in the way of His commandments. Such people are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7), i.e. *that* “knowledge” which is vital, experimental, affecting, and transforming. They are not *taught of the Spirit*.

Why is it in times of temptation and death that so many despair? Because their house is not built upon *the Rock*. Hence, as the Lord Jesus declared, “the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it *fell*” (Matt. 7:27). It could not endure the testing: when trouble and trial, temptation and tribulation came, its insecure foundation was exposed. And note the particular character Christ there depicted: “Everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, (His precepts in the much-despised “Sermon on the Mount”) and *doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (v. 26). Men may go on in worldly courses, evil practices, sinful habits, trusting in a head-knowledge of Christ to save them; but when they reach “the swelling of Jordan” (Jer. 12:5) they will prove the insufficiency of it.

Ah, dear reader, a saving knowledge is not a knowledge of Divine things, but is a Divinely-imparted knowledge. It not only has God for its Object, but God for its Author. There must be not only a knowledge of spiritual things, but a *spiritual* knowledge of the same. The light which we have of them must be answerable to the things themselves: we must see them by their own light. As the things themselves are spiritual, they must be imparted and opened to us by the Holy Spirit. Where there is a knowledge of the Truth which has been wrought in the heart by the Spirit, there is an experimental knowledge of the same, a sensible consciousness, a persuasive and comforting perception of their reality, an assurance which nothing can shake. The Truth then possesses a sweetness, a preciousness, which no inducement can cause the soul to part with it.

What the Spirit Teaches

Now as to *what* it is which the Spirit teaches us, we have intimated, more or less, in previous chapters. *First*, He reveals to the soul “the exceeding sinfulness of sin” (Rom. 7:13), so that it is filled with horror and anguish at its baseness, its excuselessness, its turpitude. It is one thing to read of the excruciating pain which the gout or gall stones will produce, but it is quite another thing for me to experience the well-nigh unbearable suffering of the same. In like manner, it is one thing to hear others talking of the Spirit convicting of sin, but it is quite another for Him to teach *me* that I am a rebel against God, and give me a taste of His wrath burning in my conscience. The difference is as great as looking at a painted fire, and being thrust into a real one.

Second, the Spirit reveals to the soul the utter futility of all efforts to save itself. The first effect of conviction in an awakened conscience is to attempt the rectification of all that now appears wrong in the conduct. A diligent effort is put forth to make amends for past offenses, painful penances are readily submitted to, and the outward duties of religion are given earnest attendance. But by the teaching of the Spirit the heart is drawn off from resting in works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:5), and this, by His giving increasing light, so that the convicted soul now perceives he is a mass of corruption within, that his very prayers are polluted by selfish motives, and that unless *God* will save him, his case is beyond all hope.

Third, the Spirit reveals to the soul the suitability and sufficiency of Christ to meet its desperate needs. It is an important branch of the Spirit’s teaching to open the Gospel to those whom He has quickened, enlightened, and convicted—and to open their understanding and affections to take in the precious contents of the Gospel. “He shall glorify Me” said the Savior, “for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14). This is His prime function: to magnify Christ in the esteem of “His own.” The Spirit teaches the believer many things, but His supreme subject is *Christ*: to emphasize His claims, to exalt His Person, to reveal His perfections, to make Him superlatively attractive. Many things in Nature are very beautiful, but when the sun shines upon them, we appreciate their splendor all the more. Thus it is when we are enabled to view Christ in the light of the Spirit’s teaching.

The Spirit *continues to teach* the regenerate throughout the remainder of their lives. He gives them a fuller and deeper realization of their own native depravity, convincing them that in the flesh there dwells no good thing, and gradually weaning them from all expectation of improving the same. He reveals to them “the beauty of holiness,” and causes them to pant after and strive for an increasing measure of the same. He teaches them the supreme importance of *inward piety*.

Study Questions: Lesson 3

First please read chapter 19 in the text.

*“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall **teach you all things.**” - John 14:26*

RESPONSE

Taught of the Spirit

1. “This is one of the distinguishing marks of the regenerate [believers]: all of them are ‘taught of the Lord’ (John 6:45).
 - a. Besides the Holy Spirit, what is the other possible source of biblical teaching?
 - b. Why is depending upon that other source alone a problem?

Tests for the Spirit’s teaching

2.
 - a. What are the four effects by which we may know whether or not the teaching which we have received has been by the Holy Spirit? List and *briefly* explain each of them.
 - b. How would you personally respond to the fourth item, wherein it is described as a “sure test?”

The Spirit applies knowledge to the heart

3.
 - a. Many *professing* Christians easily change their views, are unfruitful, and come to despair. What is the reason given for this?
 - b. Is the term ‘professing Christian’ new to you? How would you describe the difference between a *professing* and a *true* Christian? Have you known some professing Christians?

What the Spirit teaches

4. Briefly describe the three things mentioned in the text which the Spirit teaches, and note the scripture references.

REFLECTION

5. Please comment on the following quote from Charles H. Spurgeon as it relates to your progress in the course thus far:

“Many Christians experience things that have nothing to do with Christianity, but more to do with demonology. When you read the convictions of John Bunyan, you may think that all that terror was the fruit of the Holy Spirit; but be assured it was the fruit of Satanic influence. You may think it is God’s Holy Spirit that drives sinners to despair and keeps them shut up in the iron cage so long. Not at all. There was God’s Holy Spirit, and then Satan came in to mar the work if he could.

“Now I will give the poor sinner a means of detecting Satan, so that he may know whether his convictions are from the Holy Spirit, or merely the bellowing of hell in his ears. In the first place, you may always be sure that that which comes from the devil will make you *look at yourselves and not at Christ*. The Holy Spirit’s work is to turn our eyes from ourselves to Jesus Christ, but the enemy’s work is the very opposite. Nine out of ten of the accusations of the devil have to do with ourselves. “You are guilty,” says the devil, and that is self. “You have not faith”--that is self. “You do not repent enough”--that is self. “You have got such a wavering hold of Christ”--that is self. “You have none of the joy of the Spirit, and therefore cannot be one of His’--that is self. Thus the devil begins picking holes in us; whereas the Holy Spirit takes self entirely away, and tells us that we are ‘nothing at all,’ but that ‘Jesus Christ is all in all.’

“Satan brings the carcass of self and pulls it about, and because it is corrupt, tells us that most assuredly we cannot be saved. But remember, sinner, it is not your hold of Christ that saves you--it is Christ; it is not your joy in Christ that saves you--it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that is the instrument--it is Christ’s blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to your hand with which you are grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to your hope, but to Christ, the source of your hope; look not to your faith, but to Christ, the author and finisher of your faith; and if thou do that, ten thousand devils cannot throw you down, but as long as you look at yourself, the meanest of those evil spirits may tread you beneath his feet’.”

(C. H. Spurgeon, New Park Street Pulpit, ‘Comer’s Conflict with Satan’)

6. This chapter invests a significant amount of time addressing the use of means (ie, instruments) in the Spirit’s work of teaching. Based upon your observations of the following texts of Scripture, please comment on the use and importance of the tools (means) which God uses in His work with us:

Gen. 18:19	Mt. 28:19-20	Acts 10:19-48
Deut. 18:19	Rom. 10:14-15	1 Cor. 1:21
Prov. 22:6	1 Cor. 7:12-16	Eph. 4:11-12
1 Pet. 3:1		

7. What hope and encouragement does the Lord give us in the faithful use of means?

Lesson 4 The Spirit Cleansing

20. The Spirit Cleansing

The title of this chapter may possibly surprise some readers who have supposed that cleansing from sin is by the blood of Christ alone. Judicially it is so, but in connection with experimental purging, certain distinctions need to be drawn in order to a clearer understanding. Here, the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause, the blood of Christ is the meritorious and procuring cause, faith's appropriation of the Word is the instrumental cause. It is by the Holy Spirit our eyes are opened to see and our hearts to feel the enormity of sin, and thus are we enabled to perceive our need of Christ's blood. It is by the Spirit we are moved to betake ourselves unto that "fountain" which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. It is by the Spirit we are enabled to trust in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice now that we realize what Hell-deserving sinners we are. All of which is preceded by His work of regeneration whereby He capacitates the soul to see light in God's light and appropriate the provisions of His wondrous mercy.

It is now our purpose to trace out the various aspects of the Spirit's work in purging the souls of believers, for we do not wish to anticipate too much the ground we hope to yet cover in our articles upon "Sanctification," yet this present topic would be incomplete were we to pass by this important phase of the Spirit's operations. We shall therefore restrict ourselves unto a single branch of the subject, which is sufficiently comprehensive as to include in it all that we now feel led to say thereon, namely, that of *mortification*. Nor shall we attempt to discuss in detail the varied ramifications of this important Truth, for if we are spared we hope some day ere very long to devote a series of articles to its separate consideration, for it is far too weighty and urgent to be dismissed with this brief notice of it.

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). A most solemn and searching verse is this, and one which we greatly fear has very little place in present-day preaching. Five things in it claim attention. First, the persons addressed. Second, the awful warning here set before them. Third, the duty enjoined upon them. Fourth, the efficient Helper provided. Fifth, the promise made. Those here addressed are regenerated believers, Christians, as is evident from the whole context: the Apostle denominates them "brethren" (v. 12).

The Awful Warning

Our text, then, belongs to the Lord's own people, who "are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh" (Rom. 8:12); rather are they "debtors" to Christ (who redeemed them) to live for His glory, "debtors" to the Holy Spirit (who regenerated them) to submit themselves to His absolute control. But if an apprehension of their high privilege (to please their Savior) and a sense of their bounded duty (to Him who has brought them from death unto life) fail to move them unto godly living, perhaps an apprehension of their awful danger may influence them thereto: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die"—die spiritually, die eternally, for "life" and "death" in Romans always signifies far more than natural life and death. Moreover, to restrict "ye shall die" to physical dissolution would be quite pointless, for *that* experience is shared by sinners and saints alike.

It is to be noted that the Apostle did not say, "If ye *have* lived after the flesh ye shall die," for everyone of God's children did so before He delivered them from the power of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son. No, it is, "If ye live after the flesh," now. It is a continual course, a steady perseverance in the same, which is in view. To "live after the flesh" means to persistently follow the inclinations and solicitations of inward corruption, to be wholly under the dominion of the depravity of fallen human nature. To "live after the flesh" is to be in love with sin, to serve it contentedly, to make self-gratification the trade and business of life. It is by no means limited to the grosser forms of wickedness and crime, but includes as well the refinement, morality, and religiousness of the best of men, who yet give God no real place in their hearts and lives. And the wages of sin is *death*.

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." That is a rule to which there is no exception. No matter what your experience or profession, no matter how certain of your conversion or how orthodox your belief: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7, 8). O the madness of men in courting eternal death rather than leave their sinful pleasures and live a holy life. O the folly of those who think to reconcile God and sin, who imagine they can please the flesh, and yet be happy in eternity notwithstanding. "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her" (Rev. 18:7)—so much as the flesh is gratified, so much is the soul endangered. Will you, my reader, for a little temporal satisfaction run the hazard of God's eternal wrath? Heed this solemn warning, fellow-Christian: God means what He says, "IF ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."

The Duty to Mortify Sin

Let us now consider the duty which is here enjoined—“do mortify the deeds of the body.” In this clause, “the body” is the same as “the flesh” in the previous one, they are equivalent terms for the corruption of nature. The emphasis is here placed upon the body because it is the tendency of indwelling sin to pamper and please our baser part. The soul of the unregenerate acts for no higher end than does the soul of a beast—to gratify his carnal appetites. The “deeds of the body,” then, have reference not only to the outward actions, but also the springs from which they proceed. Thus, the task which is here assigned the Christian is to “mortify” or put to death the solicitations to evil within him. The life of sin and the life of grace are utterly inconsistent and repellent: we must die to sin in order to live unto God.

Now there is a threefold power in sin unto which we must die. *First*, its damning or condemning power, whereby it brings the soul under the wrath of God. This power it has from the Law, for “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor. 15:56). But, blessed be God, the sentence of the Divine Law is no longer in force against the believer, for that was executed and exhausted upon the head of his Surety: consequently, “we are delivered from the law” (Rom. 7:6). Though sin may still hale Christians before God, accuse them before Him, terrify the conscience and make them acknowledge their guilt, yet it cannot drag them to Hell or adjudge them to eternal wrath. Thus, by faith in Christ sin is “mortified” or put to death as to its condemning power (John 5:24).

Second, sin has a ruling and reigning power, whereby it keeps the soul under wretched slavery and continual bondage. This reign of sin consists not in the multitude, greatness, or prevalence of sin, for all those are consistent with a state of grace, and may be in a child of God, in whom sin *does not* and *cannot* reign. The reign of sin consists in the in-being of sin *unopposed by a principle of grace*. Thus, sin is effectually “mortified” in its reigning at the first moment of regeneration, for at the new birth a principle of spiritual life is implanted, and this lusts against the flesh, opposing its solicitations, so that sin is unable to dominate as it would (Gal. 5:17); and this breaks its tyranny. Our conscious enjoyment of this is dependent, mainly, upon our obedience to Romans 6:11.

Third, sin has an indwelling and captivating power, whereby it continually assaults the principle of spiritual life, beating down the Christian’s defenses, battering his armour, routing his graces, wasting his conscience, destroying his peace, and at last bringing him into a woeful captivity *unless it be mortified*. Corruption does not lie dormant in the Christian: though it reigns not supreme (because of a principle of grace to oppose it) yet it molests and often prevails to a very considerable extent. Because of this the Christian is called upon to wage a constant warfare against it: to “mortify” it, to struggle against its inclinations and deny its solicitations, to make no provision for it, to walk in the Spirit so that he fulfill not the lusts of the flesh.

Unless the Christian devotes all his powers to a definite, uncompromising, earnest, constant warfare upon indwelling sin: unless he diligently seeks to weaken its roots, suppress its motions, restrain its outward eruptions and actions, and seeks to put to death the enemy within his soul, he is guilty of the basest ingratitude to Christ. Unless he does so, he is a complete failure in the Christian life, for it is impossible that both sin and grace should be healthy and vigorous in the soul at the same time. If a garden is overrun with weeds, they choke and starve the profitable plants, absorbing the moisture and nourishment they should feed upon. So, if the lusts of the flesh absorb the soul, the graces of the Spirit cannot develop. If the mind is filled with worldly or filthy things, then meditation on holy things is crowded out. Occupation with sin deadens the mind for holy duties.

But who is sufficient for such a task? Who can expect to gain the victory over such a powerful enemy as indwelling sin? Who can hope to put to death that which defies every effort the strongest can make against it? Ah, were the Christian left entirely to himself the outlook would be hopeless, and the attempt useless. But, thank God, such is not the case. The Christian is provided with an efficient Helper: “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). It is only “*through the Spirit*” we can, in any measure, successfully “mortify the deeds of the body.”

True Mortification

Though the real Christian has been delivered from condemnation and freed from the reigning power of sin, yet there is a continual need for him to “mortify” or put to death the principle and actings of indwelling corruption. His main fight is against allowing sin to bring him into captivity to the lusts of the flesh. “Have *no* fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”—enter into no truce, form no alliance with—“but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Say with Ephraim of old, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (Hosea 14:8). No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified. Allowed sin draws the heart from God, entangles the affections, discomposes the soul, and provokes God to close His ears against our prayers: see Ezekiel 14:3.

Now it is most important that we should distinguish between mock mortification and true, between the counterfeit resemblances of this duty and the duty itself. There is a *pagan* “mortification,” which is merely suppressing such sins as nature itself discovers and from such reasons and motives as nature suggests (Rom. 2:14). This tends to *hide* sin rather than mortify it. It is not a recovering of the soul from the world unto God, but only acquiring a fitness to live with less scandal among men. There is a *Popish* and superstitious “mortification,” which consists in the neglect of the body, abstaining from marriage, certain kinds of meat, and apparel. Such things have “a show of wisdom” and are highly regarded by the carnal world, but not being commanded *by God* they have no spiritual value whatsoever. They macerate the natural man instead of mortifying the old man. There is also a *Protestant* “mortification” which differs nothing in principle from the Popish: certain fanatics eschew some of God’s creatures; others demand abstinence when God requires temperance.

True mortification consists, first, in *weakening* sin's root and principle. It is of little avail to chop off the heads of weeds while their roots remain in the ground—nor is much accomplished by seeking to correct outward habits while the heart be left neglected. One in a high fever cannot expect to lower his temperature while he continues to eat heartily, nor can the lusts of the flesh be weakened so long as we feed or “make provision for” them. Second, in *suppressing* the risings of inward corruptions: by turning a deaf ear to their voice, by crying to God for grace so to do, by pleading the blood of Christ for deliverance. Make conscience of evil thoughts and imaginations: do not regard them as inevitable, still less cherish them; turn the mind to holy objects. Third, in *restraining* its outward actings: “denying ungodliness,” etc. (Titus 2:12).

Our Helper

Though grace be wrought in the hearts of the regenerate, it is not in their power to act it: He who implanted it must renew, excite, and marshal it. “If ye *through the Spirit* do mortify” (Rom. 8:13). First, He it is who discovers the sin that is to be mortified, opening it to the view of the soul, stripping it of its deceits, exposing its deformity. Second, He it is who gradually weakens sin's power, acting as “the Spirit of burning” (Isa. 4:4), consuming the dross. Third, He it is who reveals and applies the efficacy of the Cross of Christ, in which there is contained a sin-mortifying virtue, whereby we are “made conformable unto His death” (Phil. 3:10). Fourth, He it is who strengthens us with might in the inner man, so that our graces—the opposites of the lusts of the flesh—are invigorated and called into exercise.

The Holy Spirit is the effective Helper. Men may employ the aids of inward rigor and outward severity, and they may for a time stifle and suppress their evil habits; but unless the Spirit of God work in us, nothing can amount to true mortification. Yet note well it is not, “If the Spirit do mortify,” nor even, “If the Spirit through you do mortify,” but, “If ye through the Spirit do mortify”! The Christian is not passive, but active in this work. We are bidden to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1). We are exhorted to “build up yourselves on your most holy faith” and “keep ourselves in the love of God” (Jude 20, 21). Paul could say, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). It is by yielding to the Spirit's impulses, heeding His strivings, submitting ourselves unto His government, that any measure of success is granted us in this most important work.

The believer is not a cipher in this work. The gracious operations of the Spirit were never designed to be a substitute for the Christian's discharge of his duty. True, His influence is indispensable, though it relaxes us not from our individual responsibility. “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21) emphasizes our obligation, and plainly intimates that God requires from His people something more than a passive waiting for Him to stir them into action. O my reader, beware of cloaking a spirit of slothful indolence under an apparent jealous regard for the honor of the Spirit. Is no self-effort required to escape the snares of Satan by refusing to walk in those paths which God has forbidden? Is no self-effort to be made in breaking away from the evil influence of godless companions? Is no self-effort called for to dethrone an unlawful habit? Mortification is a task to which every Christian must address himself with prayerful and resolute earnestness. Nevertheless it is a task far transcending *our* feeble powers.

It is only “through the Spirit” that any of us can acceptably and effectually (in any degree) “mortify the deeds of the body.” He it is who works in us a loathing of sin, a mourning over it, a turning away from it. He it is who presses upon us the claims of Christ, reminding us that inasmuch as He died *for* sin, we must spare no efforts to die *to* sin—“striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4), confessing it (1 John 1:9), forsaking it (Prov. 28:13). He it is who preserves us from giving way to despair, and encourages us to renew the conflict, assuring us that ultimately we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. He it is who deepens our aspirations after holiness, causing us to cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psa. 51:10), and moving us to “forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before” (Phil. 3:13).

The Promise

“If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, *ye shall live*” (Rom. 8:13). Here is the encouraging promise set before the sorely-tried contestant. God will be no man’s debtor: He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). If, then, by grace, we deny the flesh and co-operate with the Spirit, if we strive against sin and strive after holiness, richly shall we be recompensed. To say that Christians are unable to concur with the Spirit is to deny there is any real difference between the renewed and those who are dead in sin. It is true that without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), yet it is equally true (though far less frequently quoted) that “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Mortification and vivification are inseparable: dying to sin and living unto God are indissolubly connected: the one cannot be without the other. If we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, then, but only then, we shall “live”—live a life of grace and comfort here, and live a life of eternal glory and bliss hereafter.

Some have a difficulty here in that Romans 8:13 conditions “life” upon *our* performance of the duty of mortification. “In the Gospel there are promises of life upon the condition of our obedience. The promises are not made to the work, but to the worker, and to the worker not for his work, but for Christ’s sake according to his work. As for example, promise of life is made not to the work of mortification, but *to him* that mortifieth the flesh, and that not for his mortification, but because he is in Christ, and his mortification is the token *or evidence thereof*. And therefore it must be remembered that all promises of the Gospel that mention works include in them reconciliation with God in Christ” (W. Perkins, 1604). The conditionality of the promise, then, is neither that of causation or uncertainty, but of coherence and connection, or means and end. The Highway of Holiness is the only path that leads to Heaven: “He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8).

But let it be pointed out that the sowing of a field with grain is not accomplished in a few minutes, it is a lengthy and laborious task, calling for diligence and patience. So it is with the Christian: mortification is a *lifelong* task. A neglected garden is neither easily nor quickly rid of weeds and much care is required for the cultivation of herbs and flowers. Nor is a long-neglected heart, with its indwelling corruptions and powerful lusts, brought into subjection to the Spirit by a few spasmodic efforts and prayers. It calls for painful and protracted effort, the daily denying of self, application of the principles of the Cross to our daily walk, earnest supplication for the Spirit’s help. So “*Be not weary*” (Gal. 6:9).

In conclusion let us seek to meet the objection of the discouraged Christian. “If a true mortification must be not only a striving against the motions of inward corruptions, but also the weakening of its roots, then I fear that all my endeavors have been in vain. Some success I have obtained against the outbreakings of lust, but still I find the temptation of it as strong as ever. I perceive no decays in it, but rather does it grow more violent each day.” Answer, “That is because you are more conscious and take more notice of corruption than formerly. When the heart is made tender by a long exercise of mortification, a small temptation troubles it more than a greater one did formerly. This seeming strengthening of corruption is not a sign that sin is not dying, but rather an evidence that you are spiritually alive and more sensible of its motions” (condensed from Ezekiel Hopkins, 1680, to whom we are indebted for several leading thoughts in the first part of this chapter).

Study Questions: Lesson 4

First please read chapter 20 in the text.

*“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do **mortify the deeds of the body**, ye shall live.” - Romans 8:13*

RESPONSE

1. Cleansing is described as *mortification of sin*. ‘To mortify’ is to put to death that which is alive; therefore, the mortification of sin is ridding oneself of the sin which exists, that is, to turn from sinning as a habit in one’s lifestyle.

Who are the ones who are cleansed, in whom sin is to be mortified?

Cleansing who?

2. a. Describe the meanings of to “live after the flesh?”
b. In what ways do these describe you?

The awful warning

3. Explain the consequence of “living after the flesh?”

The duty to mortify sin

4. Briefly describe the three different powers of sin, and how each power is broken.

True mortification

5. How is non-biblical abstinence and “neglect of the body” a false mortification of sin?
6. Describe the three aspects of true mortification of sin.

Our Helper

7. How does the Holy Spirit contribute to our mortification of sin?

The promise

8. How are ‘death to sin’ and ‘life unto Christ’ related?

REFLECTION

9. What role, if any, does the Law of God serve, as you seek to overcome the inclinations of your flesh?
10. What sort of relationship should we have with other believers, in order to encourage our own personal defeat of sin and growth in godliness? (Consider Heb. 10:24-25; James 5:14-18; Eph. 4:11-16.) Do you have such relationships?

11. Using your own words, what are the key points in the following quotation from John Owen (1616-1683)?

[The Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power, from the chapter 'Mortification of Sin, The Nature and Causes of It, ', re-published in 1977 by Kregel Publications.]

The Holy Spirit enables us to mortify sin *by cherishing the principle of holiness* in our souls.

The Holy Ghost carries on this work *by actual supplies and assistances of His grace*. For the same divine aids are as necessary to this, as to any positive act or duty of holiness. So the apostle concludes his long account of the conflict between sin and grace, with that good word, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 7:25; namely, Who supplies me with gracious assistances against the power of sin. Temptation is successful only by sin; and it was with respect to a peculiar temptation, that Christ gave that answer to the apostle; "My grace is sufficient for you," 2 Cor. 12:9. *The actual supply of the Spirit of Christ enables us to withstand our temptations, and subdue our corruptions*. This is that "additional supply," Phil. 1:19, as occasion requires, beyond our daily provision; or grace given in season upon cry made for it, Heb. 4:16.

In the life of faith, the expectation and derivation of these supplies of grace, is one principal part of our duty. These things are not empty notions, as some imagine. If Christ be our head of influence; if He be our life; if our life be in Him, and we have nothing but what we receive from Him, then this expectation and derivation of spiritual strength from Him, is the way we must take for the actual mortification of sin. *We must diligently seek and wait for these supplies in the ways and means whereby they are communicated*; for though the Lord Christ gives them freely and bountifully, yet our diligence in duty will give the measure of receiving them.

If we are negligent in prayer, meditation, reading, hearing the word, and other ordinances of divine worship, we have no ground to expect any great supplies to this end. We must also abound in the actual exercise of those graces which are most directly opposite to our peculiar corruptions; for sin and grace try their strength in particular instances. If, therefore, any are more than ordinarily subject to the power of any corruption, such as passion, inordinate affection, love of the world, or distrust of God; *unless they are constant in the exercise of those graces which are diametrically opposite to these corruptions*, they will continually suffer under the power of sin.