

The Holy Spirit and Sanctification COB / 06.15.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** I have heard people say that God or the Holy Spirit told them to do something sinful. You think that is likely? No, God is not inconsistent with himself: if he previously has revealed in the Bible that something is a sin, is abhorrent to him, he is not now going to tell you to do it.
- I have heard others say that the Spirit led them to roll on the ground during church, barking like a dog or clucking like a chicken! Now I will tell you, every time I have thought the Holy Spirit was prompting me strongly to do something, it was for God's glory, someone's edification, and usually to bless someone else, and I just can't see how any of these is accomplished by rolling on the rug and clucking like a chicken. We have to discern God's voice from that of demons and our culture, or even from our own emotions and thoughts.
 - I was at a church service once, and in the middle of worship, the pastor's wife got up and had people line up in front of her, and they started dropping to the floor, supposedly "slain in the Spirit." So I went up to see what it was all about. I stood there, eyes closed, letting the music feed my emotions. I really was open to whatever the Spirit wanted to do. I didn't fall down, but I was happy, immersed in the music and at peace as I focused on God... until I felt the pastor's wife's hand shove my head down into my neck so hard that I had to fall down. Apparently she thought the Spirit needed a little help with such an obstinate sinner as me.
- † Extreme, unbiblical, undiscerning practices like these often frighten more conservative Christians, and the problem is they can cause us to swing the pendulum too far the other way.
- For example, I knew a fellow who had been a pastor of a church like this one and now was a seminary professor. He said he did not believe anyone with a corrupted human nature – which all of us have had since birth – could ever discern the voice of the Holy Spirit, and so he did not believe that the Holy Spirit could lead Christians in life. What's the problem with that? The Bible says the opposite!
 - I explained to him that my view was when I came to faith, I was very worldly and wayward, still dominated by my corrupted human nature, not like Christ at all, down at floor level of purity, if you will. But in salvation, the Bible says I was regenerated spiritually, renewed by the Holy Spirit, so though I still have a corrupted human nature, God is in the process of purifying it.
 - And as the years have passed and I have sought to follow Christ, I really do believe God is changing me. I spoke last week about how God broke me of my pride and brought me to humility, and delivered me from the bondage of lust. Well, he has changed me in many other ways too, as he has renewed my mind and transformed my character to be more like Christ.
 - Now granted, if I started at the floor and Christ's level of purity is at the ceiling, I probably have only grown to about my waist height, still far away from having a Christ-like character; but I also have grown significantly from where I was at the start, and I still am growing every day. And as I grow in my faith, my understanding of Scripture, and my ability to walk with God in his light, I can better and better discern the voice of the Holy Spirit from all the other noises in my head.
- † That's my contention. We'll see what you think when we are done today. First, let's pray...

Yielding to the Holy Spirit

- † For the past few weeks, we have been learning what the Bible teaches about “progressive sanctification,” which is a fancy term for spiritual growth. Progressive sanctification means God is sanctifying or purifying believers progressively throughout our lives after we come to faith in Christ.
 - Last week, we saw that it is God who will renew our minds and transform our characters so that we become more like Christ, more like the people he created us to be. But we noted that God asks us to take action steps as part of the means through which he brings about this blessing of growth in us, and one of those action steps is to submit to Christ in every area of our lives.
 - On the flowchart, what we covered last week are the white shapes with blue letters. I will remind you that ovals are gifts of grace and rectangles are action steps that God asks us to take, but also promises to empower us to take.

- † **[Slide 2: Yielding]** Today, we are going to talk about the Holy Spirit blessing us, but again there will be action steps, and the first one is that we need to yield to the Holy Spirit moment by moment.
 - Yielding is not just resolving to do what is right, it is a willingness to let the Holy Spirit do as he pleases in and through us. This is an act of faith similar to submitting to Christ, and certainly the more willing we are to submit to Christ’s leadership in our lives, the more we can yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit moment by moment, as he seeks to guide us. We need to be willing to turn over control, to turn over our sense of sovereignty in life, to the Holy Spirit.

- † **[Slide 3: 1 Thessalonians]** One way to learn about what it means to yield to the Spirit is by looking at two biblical explanations of how we might fail to do it.
 - The first one is found in 1 Thessalonians 5.19-22 NASB: “Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”
 - We learn in 1 Corinthians 14.3 that Christian prophecy is not about foretelling the future, rather – like so much of Old Testament prophecy – it is teaching to strengthen, encourage, exhort, rebuke, and console people. So we quench the Holy Spirit by ignoring the Spirit’s teaching and guidance.
 - And like last week, we must note again that God gets to choose the means by which he brings this blessing: sometimes the Spirit will lead us directly and sometimes the Spirit will speak through another believer the words that we need to hear.
 - **[Slide 4: BUT]** Now please note that there is a “but” in our passage. We are not to take every thought, every emotion, or every teaching from someone else and automatically assume that it is from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit can speak into our minds, but so can demons, and most of the time the thoughts we have are our own, which are influenced by our experiences and knowledge, but also by our corrupted human nature and fallen culture. So we are to test what we hear, which we can do if we know our Bible well, and then hold fast to what is from God.

- † **[Slide 5: Ephesians]** The second way we can fail to yield is found in Ephesians 4.30 NET: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”
 - The context indicates that we can grieve the Spirit by ignoring the ethical teachings we have received, and thus choosing to do what is wrong or not do what we know is right.

- So if we are yielding to the Holy Spirit, then we are responding positively to what he is teaching us. When he prompts us not to do something bad, to do something good, or to accept some form of spiritual encouragement from someone, we should yield to him by doing so. And this is an attitude we can have every moment of the day, to be open to being guided by the Holy Spirit.

Being Filled by the Holy Spirit

- † **[Slide 6: filled/Ephesians]** Yielding will allow us to be filled by the Spirit. We have discussed before that as believers we are always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet we are commanded to continue being filled by the Holy Spirit.
 - Ephesians 5.18 NET: “And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery [excessive indulgence in fleshly passions], but be filled by the Spirit...”
 - First, note that a proper translation is to be filled “by” the Spirit, rather than “with” the Spirit. There are Greek grammar reasons for this, but I won’t bore you with those. Instead, let’s think theologically. Because the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us as soon as we put our faith in Christ, we have all of the Spirit all the time, from the moment of our salvation. So it is never a question of getting more of the Spirit. Rather it is a question of giving more of ourselves over to the Spirit. We allow the Spirit to fill us by yielding to the Spirit.
 - If we did a full study on Ephesians, we would see that Paul is teaching that Christ fills believers with the character of God through the means of the Holy Spirit. So when we yield to the Spirit, we get filled by him with the character of God. We’ll talk more about this in a moment.
 - A second thing to note here is that the present tense of the Greek verb implies we should “keep being filled.” We see this continuous need in the early disciples, who were filled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first came upon them in Acts 2.4, but then needed filling again later in order to speak with the Spirit’s empowerment [Acts 4.8, 31]. We too need to keep being filled by the Holy Spirit, which will occur if we keep being yielded to the Spirit’s will in our lives.
- † **[Slide 7: controlled by]** The Greek verbs used for filling by the Spirit in the New Testament are πίμπλημι in Luke 1.67 and πληρώω in Ephesians 5.18. These verbs are used elsewhere to mean being controlled or influenced by anger [Luke 4.28], sorrow [John 16.6], and deceit [Acts 13.10].
 - Thus, to yield to the Spirit and allow the Spirit to fill you means allowing the Spirit to control and influence you, to fill you with the fullness of the character of God. We are to remain yielded and thus remain filled so that we can reflect God’s character and represent him well, which is the purpose God gave mankind at creation and gave the church after Jesus ascended to Heaven. So yielding and being filled by the Spirit is a key step in fulfilling your purpose from God.

Leading of the Holy Spirit

- † **[Slide 8: Leading/1 Corinthians]** If we do yield to the Holy Spirit and get filled by the Holy Spirit, then we will experience the Spirit leading us in two ways. Most people emphasize the lesser of these, talking all the time about wanting to hear God’s voice or how much the Spirit leads them, even in what color shirt to wear.
 - Most often, the Spirit will lead us through illumination of the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 2.12-15 NET: “Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God. And we speak about these

things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. The one who is spiritual discerns all things..."

- We believe the Holy Spirit inspired scripture, but he also illuminates scripture so that the believer can discern what God is saying. This is not absolute: I am not saying every new believer will immediately understand everything in the Bible; but the Spirit will guide us progressively if we continue seeking to understand God's revelation in the Bible.
- The Spirit also works God's truth into us by recalling to our minds scripture we have read, studied, and memorized right when we need it to guide or strengthen us, by helping us to apply scripture to our lives, and by bringing others to teach, exhort, encourage, and hold us accountable with what scripture teaches.

† **[Slide 9: Acts]** Another way the Spirit can lead us is more directly in our decision making. Look at what was happening to Paul and his team when they were on a mission trip.

- Acts 16.6-10 NET: Luke writes, "They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this, so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us!' After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them."
- So the Spirit opened and closed doors of opportunity, put things on the heart of the team, and gave Paul a vision of where he should go.

† Now, nobody will ever hear from the Spirit that something should be added to the universal revelation of the Bible. The Bible is sufficient for its own purposes, such as revealing God, the way of salvation, and the Christian life.

- But the Bible could not tell me whether LeeAnn was the right wife for me or Dallas was the right seminary for me, while the Holy Spirit could.
- As Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, once wrote, "...the child of God, facing an impossible responsibility of a heavenly walk and service, is directed to the Spirit as the source of all sufficiency" [*He That Is Spiritual*, 43]. By that he meant that the Spirit would empower us to walk obediently in the light with Christ and would lead us into right decisions.

† **[Slide 10: Romans]** If you are yielded to the Holy Spirit and thus filled by the Spirit, we can assume you will be led by the Spirit. If you were not willing to be led, then you by definition would not be yielded, and we can trust that the Holy Spirit will make his leading available if you are yielded.

- After all, Romans 8.14 NET says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God," in other words, Christians.

† Being led by the Holy Spirit is one way we depend on God, allowing the Spirit to comfort us, develop the love of Christ in our hearts, take our thoughts captive, and focus on the things of God.

- Romans 8.5 NET: "For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh..." This is what happened to me in my twenties: I did not submit to Christ in certain areas of life, those areas came to dominate me, and so by the time I was thirty, I was less

spiritually mature than I had been at fifteen, and you could not have been able to tell that I was a Christian at all by my lifestyle or my way of thinking.

- Paul continues, "...but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit." If we yield to the Spirit then we can be led by the Spirit and we will grow spiritually to be more like Christ in character, attitudes, priorities, and lifestyle.

† **[Slide 11: Ephesians]** We need to depend on the Holy Spirit for two major reasons. First, the Bible says our enemies are stronger than us [Ephesians 6.12] and ready to attack [1 Peter 5.8].

- Ephesians 6.12-13 NET: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens [i.e., demons, who are supernatural and stronger than us]. For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand [to endure in faith and obedience]."
- The second reason we need to depend on the Spirit is that we are tempted to identify with the world in its sinful ways. The passages that call on us to resist temptation and evil stress faith and dependence on God for deliverance [1 Peter 5.6-10; James 4.6-8].

† **[Slide 12: 2 Corinthians]** Before we move on, I want to revisit the idea of discernment. In my opening, I showed the two extremes of how people understand the leading of the Spirit: that we could never hear from him or that every whim we have is from him. Sadly, I think most people fall into one of those extremes, instead of learning how to truly discern the voice of the Holy Spirit.

- 2 Corinthians 10.3-5 NET: "For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ."
- If you don't take every thought captive to make it obey Christ, you might find yourself still living in sin or rolling around on the floor and clucking like a chicken! At the least, you will find it easy to rationalize your way into laziness and comfort, using your will to reshape your perception of God's, instead of letting God influence your will.

† One way we take every thought captive is to check it for rightness by scripture. If you feel prompted to do something that seems questionable to you, seek the answer in scripture and ask other mature believers to pray for guidance.

- If you are young in faith, you might be low in ability to discern God's voice. So be careful. The more you learn the Bible and thus about the character of God, the better you will be able to discern the Spirit's promptings from other impulses. Until then, don't be too sure every impulse is from God. Ask more mature believers to help you sort out what you are thinking.
- Also, ask yourself, is this impulse to do something that will glorify God or me? will it bless others or just myself? does it involve sacrifice or feeding my lusts? These are questions that can help you discern the source of your thoughts.

† Yielding to the Spirit means allowing him to influence you with the character of God, but let me ask you, does yielding to the Spirit mean we turn our minds off?

- No! We have to use our minds to discern the source of our ideas, and to check them against our biblical knowledge and theological understanding; we keep thinking, but we allow the voice of the Spirit, rather than anything else, to influence us.

Fruit of the Spirit

- † **[Slide 13: Fruit]** We said earlier that if we yielded to the Spirit then we would be filled by the Spirit with the character of God. In Galatians, Paul symbolized this by saying we would be filled with certain fruit of the Spirit.
 - Galatians 5.22-25 [NASB]: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”
 - We have noted before that such lists are not exhaustive: this fruit list is not all of the character of God; but such lists are representative and thus useful to teach us a principle.
 - Here we see that this is one way we become sanctified or purified, that we become like Christ in that these godly characteristics grow in us. As we become more intimate with God, more yielded to the Holy Spirit, we will realize a greater experience of these fruit, because we are being filled with the character of God.
- † Here is a good activity to try: give yourself a letter grade for each of these traits, like you were in school: A for excellent, B for good, etc. You can give pluses and minuses. Just be honest and write your answers on paper. Then tuck this paper away somewhere and look at it again next year, and see if your grades improve! All of these godly qualities should develop in every believer as we learn to walk by the Spirit instead of by the flesh.
- † So why don't we give ourselves all A+ grades right now? If this is a gift of the Spirit, what is holding us back from realizing the gift?
 - I first did this exercise about fifteen years ago. At the time I was at best a B- or C+ in any of these qualities and I gave myself a D for joy and F for peace. Even today, not many people would give me an A for patience or gentleness, right? But Christ is working in me, you will see as the years go by.
- † I think there are a couple of possible answers to the question of why we are not fully realizing this gift of the Spirit.
 - First, we might not be 100% yielding to the Spirit and submitting to Christ. Only as much as we submit and yield can we be filled with the character of God in that moment. When we feel impatient or ungentle, it is a sign that our flesh is striving to control us, and we are not allowing the Spirit to fill us with the character of Christ.
 - Another contributing factor can be that our lives are out of whack. Among other things, submitting to Christ involves learning to live his way, which is the way that God designed humans to live. As we have mentioned before, we as a species have forgotten how to live this way and need to learn it from God. However much imperfectly we approach the ideal lifestyle God designed for us, we will struggle with feeling peace, joy, and love.

- That's another reason why it is important to read your Bible! You cannot be obedient unless you know what to obey, and you cannot learn to live like Christ, the way God designed for you to live, unless you learn what that lifestyle is like and then start applying it to your way of living.
 - This also is a reason why it is important to be in an intimate Christian community, like a small group. God uses other believers to heal us of wrong ideas about relationships and lifestyle, so we can heal relationally, emotionally, and spiritually, and grow stronger in these areas.
- † So take a look at your grades. If they're all A+, then maybe you should find someone more objective to rate how you come across to others! If they are not all A+, then something is wrong. Pray and reflect on what that might be, and then ask God to help you in that area. Full realization of the fruit of the Spirit is something within the grasp of every believer, because it is a gift of the Spirit!

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 14: chart]** If you haven't been with us each week, I hope you will go to the church's website and listen to the sermons you missed, because they build on each other and I fear some of today's talk might be a bit arcane, mysterious, if you have not heard the previous teachings.
- The first week, we defined what sanctification is and why we should want it.
 - The second week, we shared God's vision of the work he wants to do in every believer.
 - Last week, we talked about how as part of our salvation, God begins the work of transforming our character and gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit, but also asks us to commit to submit to Christ in every area of our lives.
- † This week, we see that as much as we are willing to submit to Christ's leadership in our lives, we can also yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and as we yield to the will of the Spirit, he will fill us with God's character as represented by the Fruit of the Spirit, and he will lead us in life. This is a great source of empowerment, which we will continue to explore in a few weeks.
- † Our action steps for this week are as follows:
1. If you are not sure about who Jesus is, why the Son of God came to Earth, how dying on a cross is good for you, then come talk to me about the gospel of Jesus Christ. All God asks of you is faith in his promise of salvation through Christ.
 2. From last week's teaching, commit to submit to Christ in all areas of life!
 3. Start practicing how to yield to the Holy Spirit in each moment. It helps to pray a lot. Pray to start and end the day, pray when you know something is about to happen that might upset you, pray during events throughout the day. Ask God for empowerment to reflect his character and bring him glory. When you do slip up, quickly confess and repent, and make amends if possible and necessary.
 4. Allow the Spirit to lead you also. If you feel the Spirit prompting your heart to pray or do something nice for someone, do it! If you sense the Spirit telling you to avoid something, stay away!
 5. Reflect and pray about why you do not have an A+ in each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit!
- † Let's close in prayer together ...