

HOLY SPIRIT—SANCTIFIER

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When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Is that what happened?

If not, what happened to change or prevent it?

Our childhood dreams are not always meant to be, but God's dreams (His plans) are intended to be fulfilled.

A New Script

Now that you've become a Christian, (not "what" but) who do you want to be when you grow up? What sort of person will you become?

You don't get to rewrite your own script, but you get to let the Lord rewrite yours for you (He's the God of the second chance, and more).

In this rewritten-by-God life-script, you will discover two significant changes:

- All of your natural gifts find expression (this is the source of life's true satisfaction).
- All of His supernatural gifts find expression (this is the source of life's real fulfillment).

The goal of Christian living is not simply self-satisfaction, but the growing likeness to Jesus, God's Son.

Wholly Devoted

As Jesus prayed to the Father before His crucifixion (John 17; NKJV), He said,
¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

God's Word is the script of our sanctification; it tells us what is right and what is wrong in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit is the Director—our Teacher, our Sanctifier—who helps us choose and follow the right path.

His aim is to help me (and you) become "wholly devoted to God." That means "thoroughly" devoted—spirit, mind, and body. If your heart says, "Yes!" but your mind argues, or your flesh complains, and your actions say, "No," you are not yet wholly devoted.

Paul prayed for the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5; ESV),
²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

You may know you are on the path of thorough devotion, even while your mind argues and your flesh complains, if their resistance is minimal and the result is still obedience. Therefore, do not surrender to fear or selfishness, as if you had already lost the battle. You have not lost; you have simply discovered your opponents.

Paul once offered this illustration: the heir of a wealthy father may be an heir by birth, yet he will be consigned to tutors during his youth so that he might prove himself worthy of such a privilege.

Our sanctification is like that. We became heirs by the actions of God—by the shed blood of Jesus and our new birth. Now, we are instructed by the Holy Spirit to "lead a life worthy of [our] calling." Just as Jesus sanctified Himself for our sakes, now, in turn, we must sanctify (consecrate) ourselves. This is our part in the process.

The Holy Spirit is constantly working to instruct your conscience, so that you may distinguish the right from the wrong, and subdue the impulses of your flesh.

Of course, subduing those impulses implies that they will first be incited. That is the nature of testing. And the Holy Spirit walks us through each test.

Flesh vs. Spirit

Mark 1 (NLT)

¹² *The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days.*

It was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (tested) by the devil. He will do the same for you.

You are certainly capable of getting yourself into trying circumstances, without backup or protection, but when the Holy Spirit leads you there, then you may be sure of His protection and help, and your deliverance.

Galatians 5 (NET)

¹⁶ *Live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.*

This is the warfare of the Christian life. Now that Jesus has introduced you to the ways of the Spirit, you can see what the flesh (your flesh) has always been inclined toward and is capable of.

The flesh has its known outcomes (Galatians 5; NLT):

¹⁹ *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.*

And so does the Spirit:

²² *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.*

From this, we may also learn that the product of the flesh is all external—visible, obvious, and accomplishing no inward improvement (it does not make you a better person). To the contrary, the product of the Spirit is a notable inward grace and beauty, regardless of the resulting outer condition. This is why some people shine, even through outward calamity.

Galatians 5

²⁵ *Since we have life through the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*

As long as you live in this world, the flesh will be with you. The flesh is your frame, but it is not your friend. If you cater to your flesh, you will reap trouble and heartache. But if you yield to the Spirit's gentle promptings, you will find life and peace.

I need to insert a few comments about overcoming versus overthrowing. They are often confused by Christians, which inevitably leads to frustration and giving up the fight. For an example, let's say you struggle with being argumentative. Rather than let others think as they do and speak as they will, you feel a compulsion to argue what you insist is a "better" way. Even when the outcome is unaffected, you argue for "the principle" of the thing.

When once you realize, by the Spirit's coaching, that you are subverting your relationship by persisting in argument, you may choose instead to let the matter rest in the Lord's hands and trust His intention and ability to

work—even apart from you—in your brother’s or sister’s life. Just when you are about to interrupt with an argument, instead you bite your tongue and listen. You have just overcome the flesh. You have won the battle!

But you will fight another day, for you have not won the war. You have overcome the flesh, but you have not overthrown it. Your flesh will always be with you.

You may successfully overcome the devil’s test today, but you have not overthrown him (it is not in your power to do so; that’s reserved for the angels and the lake of fire). He’ll be back.

Luke 4 (NLT)

¹³ *When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.*

There will always be another opportunity. Don’t let that throw you. Be prepared. Stay on the alert. Remember the last time you overcame; you can do it again (you must).

Life of Faith

When the Bible speaks of being “wholly devoted,” it refers to a new kind of relationship with God.

James 2 (NLT)

¹⁹ *You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.*

You must get beyond simple belief in God; you must get to a trusting, personal relationship with Him (demons do not have that and never will). We can only get there through Jesus Christ, for there is no other Savior, and that is what the Savior does, as He said (John 14; NLT):

¹ *Trust in God, and trust also in me.*

About Him, the Heavenly Father spoke aloud on two occasions—at His baptism and at His transfiguration.

Mark 1 (NLT)

⁹ *One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove.*

¹¹ *And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”*

Matthew 17 (NLT)

¹ *Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. ² As the men watched, Jesus’ appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.*

⁵ *A bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him.”*

This is the kind of relationship to which Jesus brings us: beloved sonship. No longer enemies, but friends. No longer slaves, but sons and heirs. We have been adopted into God’s everlasting family.

Romans 8 (NLT)

¹⁵ *So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”*

How do you see yourself today (honestly)? Do you still see yourself as a slave to sin? Or as a free child of God? Do you still see yourself as a slave to law and guilt? Or as an heir of grace and love?

Do you freely identify yourself with Jesus (beyond mere labels)? Or do you still identify more with the “old you”?

When Jesus died on the cross and was buried, did that signify the death of the old, self-willed you “on paper” only, or in fact and in deed?

Equally important, when Jesus arose from the dead, did that mark a new, victorious, everlasting life for you, or is that only figurative language?

How do you identify yourself today? Do you need to rethink this? Have you trusted in Jesus with your whole heart? Or only a part?

Staying Free

Galatians 5 (NLT)

¹ *So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again.*

This underscores the importance of your personal choice (your intentionality; the proper application of your will).

The Bible is sufficient to teach you the way of whole-hearted devotion, but cannot produce it in you apart from the activity of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit will not override your will. Though He is all-powerful, He has chosen the way of love, and love is only fostered by freedom of choice. Puppets do not love. Computer programs do not love. Machines do not love.

Of course, people may not choose to love, but they *can*. They can choose to love! They can choose devotion. They can choose freedom.

Choose to stay free. Every day (usually, many times each day) you will have opportunities to choose. Use your will power to choose the Spirit's way. Choose to follow the Spirit's lead.

Lifelong Process

This is a lifelong process. You will win the many battles between flesh and spirit by embracing Jesus in the confidence that He will save you—right then.

I say, “embracing Jesus,” rather than fighting sin. “Fighting sin” is the wrong mental position; you cannot save yourself. “Resist,” yes; “fight,” no. Resist in faith.

You will win by standing (not running or fighting, but)—standing in faith.

Ephesians 6 (NLT)

¹¹ *Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.*

¹³ *Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground.*

This is the definition of Christian perseverance. It is not simply “putting up with” hardship, but actively trusting that God is in charge, that He knows what He is doing, that He is good, and that He can be trusted to save us in the end.

When we face trials, our usual response is to quickly evaluate ourselves: Do we possess the know-how to manage this? Can we imagine a good outcome? Do we have the energy reserves to get through it or to beat it?

If we can answer, “Yes,” then we may simply leave God out of the equation and press ahead in our own strength, until it gives out.

If we answer, “No,” then we may succumb to the pressure, unless we have an alternative.

How can we persevere, if we have no strength? Through Christ, “who gives [you] strength.” The Holy Spirit is your Personal Trainer, your Strengthener. By Him, Jesus communicates strength to you as you act in faith. Make your choice to trust in the Lord, move forward in confident obedience, and receive His strength to overcome.

This is “the faith and patience of the saints” (God’s holy children).

Craig Barnes, once pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., told this story:

When I was a child, my minister father brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose. There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they’d just raise him as if he were one of their own sons.

At first it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home—an environment free of heroin-addicted adults! Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger:

"No, no. That's not how we behave in this family."

"No, no. You don't have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want."

"No, no, Roger, we expect you to show respect in this family."

And in time Roger began to change.

Now, did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family? No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father. But did he then have to do a lot of hard work because he was in the family? You bet he did. It was tough for him to change, and he had to work at it. But he was motivated by gratitude for the incredible love he had received.

Do you have a lot of hard work to do now that the Spirit has adopted you into God's family? Certainly. But not in order to become a son or a daughter of the heavenly Father. No, you make those changes because you *are* a son or daughter. And every time you start to revert back to the old addictions to sin, the Holy Spirit will say to you, "No, no. That's not how we act in this family."