The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Sanctification of Believers

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Outline

Thesis: What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers?

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Introduction

Sanctification is the process by which God has chosen to create a people for himself. It is a major part of God’s redemptive plan and the primary work he does to develop godly character in his people. Sanctification is a word that has been used in a variety of ways, but biblically speaking, it primarily pertains to Christian conversion and secondarily to growth in the Christian life. Sanctification is highly Christological, for it is through identification with Jesus that one becomes sanctified and grows in sanctification. But as much as sanctification is Christological, it is also pneumatological, for it is the Spirit who, at every level, makes identification with Christ both a possibility and a reality for the believer. Since sanctification plays such a vital role in God’s salvific plan (Lev. 19:2; Heb. 12:14), it is essential to understand how one is sanctified. And since the Holy Spirit is the primary agent who serves as both the source and the instigator of such activity, it is the intent of this paper to answer the question: what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers?

I. Sanctification: The Biblical Perspective

In order to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers, it is imperative to first come to an accurate understanding of the meaning of sanctification. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the ways sanctification is used in both the Old and New Testaments and arrive at a functional definition that will provide a better understanding of both what sanctification is and how the Holy Spirit affects sanctification in believers.
In the Old Testament, references to sanctity, or holiness (which is its closest synonym), cluster around a family of Hebrew terms sharing a common root—the verb qadash, the noun godesh, and the adjective qadosh—which represents the idea of setting apart, especially for the work of God.¹ This separation is accomplished through the process of ritualistic activities such as cleansing (e.g. the washing of garments in preparation for an encounter with God’s presence Exodus 19:10, 14) and consecration.² And this separation is undergone so that the object—whether human or instrument—may be possessed by God. In this act of separation God repossesses persons and things that have been devoted to other uses and takes them into his own possession in order that they might reflect his glory.³

It has become common to understand sanctification as the process by which people are made holy—that is, how people develop moral and spiritual qualities that correspond to that individual’s perception of what holiness is.⁴ In the Old Testament, however, when the term is used it is primarily focused on one’s position, rather than one’s moral or ethical commitments; it describes the status of a person or object


⁴ One’s perception of holiness will be primarily determined by the beliefs of the community he or she belongs to. Different communities define and measure sanctification in different ways. Because of this, for one individual, sanctification might mean developing a daily quite time, for another it might mean to abstaining from alcoholic beverages, swearing, adultery, etc. The emphasis will differ depending upon the social context.
that is set aside from ordinary use to God’s service.\(^5\) It is a forensic term which entails a legal declaration of a new status before God; a status that stems from a new relationship to God.

Now that the Old Testament understanding of sanctification has been described, it is possible to trace the meaning of this word in the New Testament. The Greek word for sanctification is hagiasmos, a derivative of hagios, meaning holy. In the New Testament, this word is used to describe a number of objects: material things (Matt 23:17, 19; 2 Tim 4:15), God’s people (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11 Acts 20:32; 26:18; Heb. 10:10; 14)\(^6\) and God himself. But its primary referent is to an event in the past in which believers were sanctified once for all (Heb 10:29).\(^7\) In fact, Paul’s primary use of the term sanctification is as a figure of speech for conversion (Heb 10:29).\(^8\) Because of this, believers can regularly be addressed as hagiasmenoi, meaning ‘the sanctified’ (I Cor. 1:2; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Rom. 15:16).

Hagiasmos is first and foremost a relational word, which as in the Old Testament, signifies the state of being separated and set apart for God; it describes a position that believers find themselves in.\(^9\) It is therefore an objective reality, describing “a standing in righteousness which is ours solely by virtue of the grace God extended

\(^5\) Grenz 575.

\(^6\) Each time this word is used to describe people, it is in the plural.

\(^7\) Bockmuehl 613.

\(^8\) Gordon Fee, Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996) 93.

to us in Christ and which the Holy Spirit applies to our lives.”

Understood in this way, *hagiasmos* is primarily about a person’s status before God, not what they do as a result of that status.

The Biblical perspective seems to clearly indicate that sanctification is primarily about being God’s people set apart for him, his purposes and his glory. But in addition to this, there is a conditional understanding of sanctification which encompasses behavioral transformation. This aspect of sanctification is about the morality and lifestyle that result from one’s position as *hagiasmenoi*. Conditional sanctification pertains to the actions that actually shape one’s life—to what one actually chooses to do and not to do. In this sense, sanctification is not objective, but subjective; it is not once for all, but progressive; it is not constant, but variable (Heb 10:14). It pertains to Christian maturity and to increasing conformity to the standard, which is Jesus.11

Before moving on, it must be stated that above all else, holiness in Scripture is a description of God. He is repeatedly identified as the Holy One (Is. 40:25; Ezk. 39:7; Hos. 11:9; Hab. 1:12; 3:3) and Isaiah says that his name is Holy. “This terminology refers to the distinctness or otherness of God in his character, activity and words.”12 In addition to this, however, God is holy not because of his attributes but because of who he is—his ontological essence more than

10 Grenz 575.

11 Grenz 578.

his demonstrated characteristics is what makes him holy. And it is
God’s holiness in nature that provides the motivation for
sanctification: he is holy, therefore, his people are to be holy (Lev.
11: 44, 45 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). And not only is God the motivation for
holiness, he is also the agent of holiness. In fact, the verb hagiazō
(to sanctify, make holy) is never used without a member of the Godhead
as its primary agent. In the Scriptures, sanctification is said to be
the work of God (1 Thes. 5:23), of Christ (Eph. 5:26; Heb. 2:11) and
especially of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1
Cor. 6:11). But not only are all three members said to participate in
sanctification, they also all have a specific role in the process of
sanctification.

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In summation, it is clear that God is holy, that he demands his
people be holy and that he is the one who enables his people to become
holy primarily through the agency of his Holy Spirit. In addition to
this, sanctification primarily denotes a state in which believers find
themselves and it can also describe a realm of human action in which


14 Porter 398.

15 Holloman 19.
believers live in correspondence with their given holiness.\textsuperscript{16} In short, believers both live and grow in holiness.

Since sanctification in the Bible is primarily used in reference to one’s positional status before God, the next question that must be answered is: how does the Holy Spirit bring people to the initial point of sanctification? Once this question is answered, the focus will then shift to show what the Holy Spirit does in the believer at the initial point of sanctification. Lastly, attention will be given to the Spirit’s interaction with the believer after bringing them past the initial point of sanctification.

II. The Holy Spirit’s Role in Initiating Sanctification

If sanctification is properly understood as pertaining to one’s relational status before God, then it is imperative to understand how God brings people to that initial point of sanctification. It will be shown that this sanctifying work is done through the Holy Spirit as he convicts the world of guilt and enables faith through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Before attempting to grasp how the Holy Spirit makes people holy, it is essential to recognize that this work of sanctification is in fact the work of God. God is always the one who sanctifies, and human sanctification depends entirely upon his initiative. Because of sin, the natural person is unable to seek after God and his sanctifying work on his own (Ps. 14:1-3; Rom. 3:9-12). Instead, it is only when the Spirit acts upon the unregenerate people that their yearning for God is heightened and they begin to seek his sanctifying work of

\textsuperscript{16} Bockmuehl 613.
salvation.\textsuperscript{17} This is not an assertion of the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity but merely the recognition of the Biblical doctrine that man, on his own, does not seek to be sanctified by God and that any search that may be made has the Spirit’s prompting as its ultimate source.

During Jesus’ final discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke about how the Spirit would bring people to this initial point of sanctification. John 16:8-11 records Jesus saying, “When he (the Counselor) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father where you can see men no longer; and in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” This description of the Spirit’s work among the world will be examined to discover the Spirit’s role in bringing humanity to the initial state of sanctification.

When Jesus said that the Spirit will 	extit{convict} the world of guilt, he used the Greek word 	extit{elegchei}, which was a technical term used to describe what a prosecuting attorney does in a courtroom in order to convict the accuser of crime.\textsuperscript{18} This verb has the meaning of “to expose, bring to light, or convict someone of something.” The basic New Testament usage basically means, “to show someone his sin and to

\textsuperscript{17} Donald Bloesch, \textit{The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts} (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) 287.

\textsuperscript{18} Donald Williams, \textit{The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit} (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 52.
summon him to repentance.”¹⁹ This is what the Spirit does to the world, and he does it in regard to three things: sin, righteousness and judgment. Each of these nouns is without the definite article and therefore it is clear that Jesus was referring to the basic ideas rather than to individual sins.²⁰

The Spirit is first said to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin because men do not believe in Jesus. In the Greek, “do not believe” is present and therefore expresses the idea of continuous disbelief. This sin of unbelief pertains specifically to the world’s continuous rejection of God’s revelation in Jesus (both his words and his life). Accordingly, to John, this is the chief sin of which men are guilty (1:11; 3:19; 15:22).²¹ And, as has appropriately been noted, “All other individual sins find expression in or are related to this basic sin of disbelief.”²² The full meaning of this statement is therefore not restricted to the vote of the Jewish Sanhedrin and the decision of Pilate; it instead pertains to the essential attitude of the world. Jesus is saying that when the Spirit comes, he will prove that the world was wrong when they decided he was not of God, and the Spirit will summon them to repent for not believing in him. It is clear, therefore, that before an individual is able to be sanctified

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²² Brown 712.
in God’s sight, s/he must be convicted by the Holy Spirit that s/he were wrong about Jesus and that he is, in fact, God’s messiah and revelation to humanity.

Secondly, the Spirit will convict the world of guilt in regard to righteousness. The righteousness which the Spirit is to convict the world of should not be understood as its own righteousness, but rather Jesus’. For when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, which was the ultimate act of humiliation and disgrace, he was declared by this world to be unrighteous. But as the text says, Jesus is going to the Father, where they can see him no longer. Even though the cross at first declared Jesus unrighteous, God used this as the means of Jesus’ exaltation to heaven. And therefore, “it was at once God’s reversal of the verdict of men, and so his attestation of the innocence of Jesus over against the world’s allegations against him.” God’s vindication of Jesus in the resurrection/ascension is the ultimate proof of his righteousness. It is this that the Spirit convicts the world of, that Jesus is, without a question, not only righteous but God’s righteous one (Acts 3:14-15). Without such a conviction, it would not be possible for one to be brought to the point of sanctification. The clear implication is that one’s identification with Christ rests upon the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Furthermore, the Spirit is said to convict the world of guilt in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned. If the events of Jesus’ passion week, including his death,

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23 Contra Carson.

24 Beasley-Murray 283.
represent his battle with the prince of this world (12:31), then in triumphing over death Jesus likewise triumphed over Satan, who now stands condemned as a result. Simply stated, the very fact that Jesus is victorious over death and stands justified before his Father results in Satan’s defeat and condemnation (Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:10, 12; 20:7-10). Therefore, the Spirit’s role is to give the world conclusive proof that, like the prince of this world, its cause against Jesus has been lost and a stance against him will result in similar judgment.

If the Spirit were not to come and convict the world of guilt, it would not be possible for humanity to turn to Christ. People are only sanctified as the Spirit illumines to the world who Jesus is and the implications of his work on the cross. And not only does the Spirit convict the world of the identity and work of Jesus, he also is the one who finally enables belief in Jesus (i.e. enables the event through which sanctification takes place).

Such a conclusion is clearly indicated by the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Here it is stated, “From the beginning, God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and belief in the truth.” In this verse the two co-ordinate activities are linked by the one expression in the Greek (en hagiasmo pneumatos kai pistei aletheias), however, the order is unusual. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is mentioned first, and then belief in the truth is spoken of. This suggests that Paul is using terminology of sanctification to refer to the Spirit’s work in initiating a relationship with God and in enabling the belief through which this relationship begins. It is
clear, therefore, that belief in the truth comes from the Spirit’s enabling.\textsuperscript{25} The conclusion is simple, not only does the Spirit’s sanctifying work involve conviction, it also includes enabling faith in Jesus.

If the Spirit’s role in bringing someone into relational sanctification is to convict and enable faith, it must be noted that these are primarily accomplished by the means of preaching the gospel. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5 both clearly indicate that Paul’s message rested upon the power of the Spirit. The wondrous results of his preaching did not come about by his persuasive rhetoric or wisdom but rather from his content which was Jesus Christ and him crucified. His message was exceptionally powerful because it came with the Spirit, and it was the Spirit’s presence that resulted in conversion. In fact, Paul says that their conversion is proof that the Spirit empowered his message. Fee notes that these verses lead us to believe that “Paul understood the Christian conversion to begin with Spirit empowered proclamation, which by the same Spirit found its lodging in the heart of the hearer so as to bring conviction of sin and the gospel truth.”\textsuperscript{26}

Spirit empowered proclamation of the Christ event is clearly an indispensable element in one’s sanctification. This conclusion is clearly supported by Romans 10:13-15, which indicates that the preaching of the gospel message is the means through which people are sanctified. Paul actually indicates in these verses that without the

\textsuperscript{25} Peterson 61.

\textsuperscript{26} Fee \textit{PSPG}, 78.
declaration of the good news, it is next to impossible to call upon Jesus and be saved. But the only reason the declaration of the gospel is so essential is because of the work of the Spirit in the message. The message is not received simply because of its truth, but rather because the Spirit has chosen to work through the gospel message to invite the world to join in salvation. As Grenz has said, “As human agents declare the gospel, the Spirit acts through the message to strengthen the hearer to respond.”

27 It is because of the Spirit’s work through the Gospel that it is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone.”

In summation, it is clear from all of this that the initial act of sanctification begins with a sovereign act of God carried out by the Holy Spirit. 28 It is the Spirit who convicts the world of its disbelief in Jesus, and it is also the Spirit who shows the world the futility of such disbelief because of Jesus’ vindication. This conviction is the Holy Spirit’s presentation of the case for Christ. And as the Spirit presents the gospel through human agents (2 Cor. 5:20), he both summons the defendants to repent and enables them to make such a choice. It is clear that a positive choice can only be made because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The Spirit’s work always precedes belief in the truth. Therefore, at every point of relational sanctification, the activity of the Spirit is essential.

III. The Holy Spirit’s Role in Effecting Sanctification

27 Grenz 541.

28 Fee 82.
Now that the Spirit’s role in bringing individuals to the initial point of sanctification has been addressed, the next question of interest pertains to the work of the Spirit at this point of sanctification. That is, what is it that the Spirit does in the lives of believers that actually makes them sanctified, and what is the result of this pneumatological work? An exegetical look at Romans 8:1-2 will enable us to answer these questions.

In Romans 8, Paul writes, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” In this passage, the emphasis is not on what Christians must do to become sanctified but on what God has done in them through the agency of the Holy Spirit as a result of the work of Christ.

Paul begins this description of life in the Spirit with an assertion that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The verses that follow this declaration explain why it is true and “sum up in a striking way Paul’s teaching on sanctification.” In verse 2 Paul begins his explanation by writing, “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.” It should be noted first that the use of the term “law” in this passage is most likely not in reference to the Torah but to the metaphorical law of sin. In this case, the law is not in reference to the Old Testament commands or to any other

ordinance, but to an authority or control that is being exercised. This law of sin is the authority of the flesh, to which the world is subject as a result of the fall. Sin and death are the inevitable consequence of being under such authority.

But Paul says “in Christ Jesus,” that is, on the basis of what God has done in Christ, the authority exerted by the life giving Spirit has freed the believer from the authority of the law of sin. Like the liberation mentioned in 6:22, this liberation from the law of sin was affected in Christ Jesus and the benefits of the liberation are applied to believers by the indwelling Spirit. Here, the prepositional insertion “through Christ Jesus” functions as the soteriological basis for the work of the Spirit in dispensing life to believers. The Spirit’s work, therefore, is dependant upon the prior work of Christ (described in 3:21-26). The first liberation came through Christ (8:1), and this liberation is the basis upon which the Spirit affected in believers a second liberation (8:2).

In this passage the Spirit is called “the Spirit of life.” Fee believes that this is the single most significant description of the Spirit in the Pauline corpus. The Spirit is the Spirit of life because he is the Spirit of God, who is the living One, and the source of life in all who live—but especially for those who come to God

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30 Crainfield 227. Support for this position is found in the fact that Paul has already used nomos in this way in 7:21, 23, 25.

31 Crainfield 227.

32 Peterson 110.

through Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{34} In this case, he is the Spirit who gives life over against the death that issues from the law of sin. This life comes as a result of the believer’s experience of Christ, which has the Spirit as its source.

The Spirit gives life and sets believers free by enabling them to experience Jesus—more precisely—by mediating to them Jesus’ saving work. It is as the Spirit makes Jesus’ life, death and resurrection real in an experiential way for the believer that he frees them from the sin which Jesus’ resurrection won victory over. And it is when Jesus’ victory over sin has been made a reality in the believer via the work of the Spirit that the believer is finally able to do something he was previously unable to do: stop sinning (Rom 3:9-18). Sin was previously the tyrant of this life (7:14-25), but through mediating the work of Christ to believers, the Spirit sets them free from its stranglehold.

In the Greek, “has set free” is in the aorist tense, thus the clear affirmation is that this liberation has actually been accomplished. But it must be said that this refers to the beginning of the action, not to its completion. The completion of this liberation (which will allow one’s behavior to effortlessly correspond to one’s position) will not take place until Christ’s return or one’s death and resurrection, and not before. This understanding keeps one from an over-realized eschatology and from a belief that all Spirit-people will always act in accordance with their status—or at least from a stance that Christians are delivered from the realm of the flesh and

\textsuperscript{34} Fee \textit{GEP} 525.
into a less-troubled realm of the Spirit. Such positions fail to come to grips with the fact that life in the Spirit, while lived in union with Christ, is still lived “between the times.” Because of the work of the Spirit at conversion, Christians live in a new sphere and under a new order, but this new existence is still lived out in a world under the dominion of the old. So long as this is true, struggle, hardship and tension with the old authority will always exist. But the old authority can do no more than exist, for believers have already been freed from its tyranny and its complete destruction is imminent. Simply put, because of the Spirit’s application of the work of Christ, Christians stand in relation to sin in the same eschatological tension that marks all present life in the Spirit: already its reign has been ended, but not yet has its presence been eliminated.

As stated previously, the Spirit brings believers to this point by uniting them to Christ in his death and resurrection and making this historical event an experienced reality in their lives. This is the heart of the Christian experience—unity with Jesus through the ministry of the Spirit. And the result of this Spirit-brought unity is what sanctification is primarily about. In fact, Ferguson defines sanctification as “the Spirit’s outworking into the whole person a life-through-death unity with Christ.” And this unity is not to stop at conversion, but is to instead remain the hallmark of a Christian’s life. It is as believers grow in conformity to the crucified and risen

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35 Ferguson 149.
36 Ferguson 149.
37 Ferguson 171.
Christ that they grow in sanctification and enable Jesus’ life to manifest itself through them. Again, the pneumatological aspect of sanctification is to apply the death of Jesus to the life of believers with the result that they can live a transformed, victorious life. This brings us back to the purpose of God, who predestined all believers to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29) and desires to reproduce the family likeness in his people. The way God brings this resemblance is through employing the same pattern that he used to sanctify his Son; death and resurrection—which the believer experiences through the work of the Spirit. Therefore, the sanctifying work of the Spirit at the point of conversion is essential to God’s plan, the believer’s destiny, and the believer’s ability to actually live like Christ.

It has been shown that the Spirit not only brings individuals to the point of sanctification, he is also the one who sanctifies them at that point, and he does this by accomplishing in them what Christ has done for them. This eternal transaction has very real implications for the way believers live. It is clear throughout the Scriptures that Christians are not only supposed to be holy, but also to live holy lives. Put another way, believers are not only to live in sanctification; they are to grow in sanctification. Therefore, the next pneumatological point of interest is the role of the Spirit in conditional sanctification.

IV. The Holy Spirit’s Role in Conditional Sanctification

When the Holy Spirit effects union with Christ in the believer’s life, he not only effects in them eschatological realities, he also
begins to transform the believer into the image of Christ. This work is classified as conditional sanctification. In this context, one’s sanctification is not determined by one’s status but instead by his or her likeness to Jesus. This is clearly a pneumatological work because, as mediator of the presence of Christ, the Spirit promotes desires, attitudes, and behaviors which are in congruency with the person and teaching of Christ. Essentially, the Spirit is at work within believers creating in them a new nature of which Christ is the archetype. This is why so often in the New Testament the indwelling Holy Spirit is presented as the one who enables believers to live a life that is pleasing to God. However, as common sense tells us, while this may indeed be a work of the Spirit, believers also play a significant role in this process as well. Accordingly, in this section we will not only examine the work of the Spirit, but also the work of the believer in conditional sanctification.

In Romans 1:5 Paul says that the goal of his ministry is to bring about “the obedience of faith.” It is clear that Paul is speaking about appropriate behavior which springs from one’s faith in Christ. This small phrase depicts God’s design for a new humanity in Christ. Faith in Christ is the life-changing, sanctifying activity produced by the Spirit which naturally has profound practical implications. The Spirit, having sanctified God’s people through belief in the gospel,


39 Peterson 60.
continues to motivate and enable them to offer themselves in his service in a holy, acceptable, and pleasing way.\(^{40}\) Thus, it is the Spirit who enables believers to live an eschatological life. This is a life that, while lived in the present, accurately reflects life in the future—where every aspect of one’s conduct will accurately display the character of God and the absolute dominion of his sovereign will.

In Romans 8:3-4 Paul writes, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit.” In this passage Paul says that God sent his Son to do what the Law could not do in securing salvation, and that God sent his Spirit to do what the Law could not do in terms of effecting true righteousness.\(^{41}\) It is clear, therefore, that the gift of the Spirit brings about the obedience from the heart that the law demanded and is God’s provision for righteous living.\(^{42}\)

This is exactly what God promised in Ezekiel 36:27 when he said, “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”\(^{43}\) It is the Spirit who enables believers to do what God has decreed, and this is something the Law could never do.

\(^{40}\) Peterson 60.

\(^{41}\) Fee GEP, 842.

\(^{42}\) Not only is the Spirit the one who effects righteous living, his presence in the believer’s life is actually the grounds for righteous living (1 Thes. 4:8).

\(^{43}\) See also Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12.
While the Law allowed God’s people to know what God’s will was, the Spirit empowers believers to actually do God’s will. And not only does the Spirit empower believers, he also identifies the People of God under the new covenant and enables them to demonstrate to the world who God is. Therefore, the Spirit supersedes the Law in every regard because everything the Law did, the Spirit does better. The Spirit provides new possibilities for humanity because as his presence characterizes the believers’ new existence, he enables them to live and act in conformity with their newly found identity.

Now that it has been stated that the foundation for conditional sanctification/Christian behavior is in the work of the Spirit, it is possible to examine the role of the believer in this process. This is an important task because even though the Holy Spirit is the ultimate agent of sanctification, in this process he requires personal cooperation on the believer’s behalf (2 Pet. 1:5-11). This only makes sense, for even though the Spirit is able and willing, his empowering has little affect if believers are not resolved to respond and act accordingly. This whole discussion is of paramount importance, since the goal of individual conversion is for believers to actually be transformed into the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29). It is obvious that this transformation will only be fully realized in the eschaton (Phil 3:21), but even in this life believers are called to live like Christ.

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44 Grenz 579.

If Christ-like living is the standard, then it must be noted that this type of conditional sanctification can not be attained simply by moral effort or by striving to live like Jesus. And it is certainly not attained by “letting go and letting God.” Rather, practical holiness involves putting to death in our lives what God has already sentenced to death on the cross (mortification) and living our new life by the indwelling Spirit (vivification). Human effort is necessary, but this effort will be futile if it is apart or divergent from the activity of God’s Spirit. For it is the Spirit who gives believers the capacity to both subdue the flesh and conduct one’s self in a manner pleasing to God. The mutuality of this work is stated most clearly in Philippians 2:12b-13, where Paul writes, “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” It is true that believers must work our their salvation (not earning it, but rather living in the obedience that it inevitably produces), but it is equally true that the primary source for this work is the Spirit of God, who is at work within believers to bring this God-designed plan for holiness to fruition.

Scripture talks about day to day guidance by the Holy Spirit—being led (Rom. 8:14) and walking/living according to the Spirit (Gal.

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46 Peterson 112.

47 A great illustration is that of a sail-ship and the wind. The wind (the Spirit) is the ultimate source of every positive movement. In fact, the ship will remain stationary without the wind. But the ship (the believer) must still set the sail and direct the course of its path. The ship can do nothing by itself, but if the ship sets the sail for the wind to move, the harmonious cooperation results in progress.
5:16). It is possible to think that Paul is referring only to obedience to the moral commands of Scripture, but this is unlikely, particularly because the context of both these passages (primarily Gal. 5:16) is dealing with emotions and desires which believers perceive in a subjective way. These scriptures seem to imply that when one is led by the Spirit, they behave and live in ways that are strikingly different than one who is led by the flesh. This distinct contrast clearly indicates that the believer’s life should be responding moment by moment to the desires of the Holy Spirit, not to the desires of the flesh. And when this is true, the believer’s life will not be in accordance with the acts of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) but with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). And therefore it is by the Spirit leading the believer and the believer “living by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) or “keeping in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25) that the he or she actually becomes like Christ. For the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 is nothing less than a mirror image of Christ himself.

Now the fruit of the Spirit is not another law, rather this fruit simply points to what one looks like when living by the Spirit. This list of fruit is not to regulate Christian behavior, it is simply to indicate that true Christian ethics are produced by walking and living in accordance with the desires of the Spirit. Tangibly speaking, a large part of this comes from knowing both what the Spirit desires and

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49 Fee PSPG, 113. Another description of the Fruit of the Spirit that I like is “a short biography of Jesus’ life.”
what the result of being led by him looks like. It is at this point where the Spirit’s enlightening of the believer’s mind comes into play. In Colossians 1:9-10 Paul prays for the believing community to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will by means of the Spirit’s wisdom and insight. And he prays this so that they might walk worthy of the Lord (i.e. in ways that are pleasing to him). Thus, rather than giving them Christian rules to live by Paul gives them the Spirit.\(^50\) Paul prays this because he knows that when the believers receive the Spirit and the illumination that he brings, that they will then be able to determine the will of God and live a life that pleases him. Therefore, as Paul urged the Romans, one of the chief roles of the believer is to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:2). When this is done, the believer will then be able to test and approve what God’s will is—and, through the Spirit, walk in it.

Walking in the Spirit is the primary command of heart Paul’s ethic.\(^51\) But at the very center of every command is a theological issue—that is, an issue related to the known character of God. Because of this, everything has to do with God and what God is about in Christ and in the Spirit.\(^52\) Paul’s thought was that the believer’s mind and his understanding of truth would determine his conduct. Accordingly, some scholars approach New Testament ethics as the pattern of holiness

\(^{50}\) Fee PSPG, 106.

\(^{51}\) Paul uses this word 17 times in regard to Christian behavior. In Judaism, walking encompassed a person’s whole way of life. Therefore, walking in the Spirit means responding to him in every dimension of one’s life

\(^{52}\) Fee PSPG, 106. This is certainly not to say that at other times rules are not given by apostolic authority or that rules are bad. It is simply to assert that the Spirit and the enlightenment which is brought by his activity precedes obedience.
which is commanded as a result of who God is and what he has done. This is deemed the indicative/imperative approach to ethics: the mind is informed about God and this is the basis for one’s actions. But a better way of interpreting the grounds for proper behavior is by the use of narrative ethics. Narrative ethics is a term used to describe the tension that exists in New Testament ethics between the description of the believer’s current condition (as justified) and the ethical appeal (for sanctification).\textsuperscript{53} This makes ethics more than just an appeal to grammatical forms to establish moral directives.\textsuperscript{54} Instead, ethics are seen as a set of directives for behavior which derive from descriptions of the believer’s condition in Christ. The force of the directives, therefore, will be dependant upon how well the author has described his audiences’ condition in Christ, or in other words, has narrated the story of Christ.\textsuperscript{55} This is pneumatological because it is the Spirit who enables believers to grasp the story of Christ and also whose presence makes Christ’s story real to them.

Narrative ethics is about the story of Christ and about the establishment of God’s rule in the person of Christ. This fact is not a task to be completed but a story to be lived out. This story is lived out in the believer as his way of approaching reality is changed because of what he believes to be true about Jesus. This story becomes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Porter 401.
\item \textsuperscript{54} The only grammatical form in narrative ethics is the gospel story itself, which the Spirit uses to direct the life of believers.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Porter 401.
\end{itemize}
the fountainhead from which he draws upon to determine what he will
and will not do. By doing this, the believer not only allows the
Gospel to tell itself through his life but also is transformed and
becomes characterized by the Gospel. The reality is that one’s
character will be determined by the story s/he believes. And in
illumining to believers the story of Jesus, the Spirit transforms the
believers’ approach to reality and allows them to embody this story in
their lives by walking in him. To bring this full circle, this in
essence is what conditional sanctification is all about: becoming like
Jesus and allowing the world to see who Jesus is through one’s life.
This is both pneumatological and personal. It is pneumatological
because this work begins with the Spirit, who is also the source
throughout the process. And it is personal because believers are
required to participate in this process by keeping in step with the
Spirit and allowing the Spirit to transform his or her thought process
by the renewal of their minds—and therefore their approach to reality.

Conditional sanctification is about much more than simply keeping
the rules and abstaining from poor behavior. It is about living a life
in intimacy with God’s community and behaving in such a way that the
given individual is always an accurate representation of that
community. God’s community is characterized by the gospel—and through
the Spirit, the lives of those within the community are also
characterized by the gospel. And it is through the believing community
and the individuals that make up that community that the Spirit speaks
the Gospel to the world. This is one of the reasons conditional
sanctification is so important, because the world comes to understand the Gospel by the way Christians live.

Conclusion

In summation, it is clear throughout the Scriptures that sanctification is of paramount importance. It is also clear that this process is brought about by the presence and power of the Spirit of God. In fact, the Spirit of God is the essential element in every aspect of one’s sanctification. He not only brings individuals to Jesus, he also imparts Jesus to them and allows them to live the type of life that Jesus did (the Gospel). As Fee has noted, “The Spirit and the Spirit alone not only gets us on our way in Christ but also is what Christian life is finally all about.”56 This is not to say that believers do not have a role in sanctification, for it is clear that individuals become the people they are based upon the decisions that they make. But it is the Spirit who enables believers to understand what the Christian decision is and then empowers them to live out the Gospel as they act in accordance with that knowledge. Christians are not forced by the Spirit to do this (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19), but, through the Spirit, they are enabled to participate in the Spirit’s sanctifying work. The Spirit is our Emmanuel, he is God with us. It is his presence which signals the fact that a new eschatological age has infused into the present and it is his power that enables God’s people to live an eschatological life today. This is so essential because heaven and earth are anxiously awaiting the emergence of a Spirit-led, Spirit intoxicated people who will demonstrate the person and

56 Fee PSPG, 95.
character of God by the manner and mode of their lives. This is what sanctification is about: being and living as the people of God, by the presence and power of the Spirit of God.
Works Consulted


