

SPIRIT

SEEKING THE POWER OF CHRIST

For to set the mind on the flesh is death,
but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
— APOSTLE PAUL, *Romans 8:6*

This is a study on loving God. But we are not as loving as we imagine. So great is our sin that God must love if we are to love. God must work within if from within we are to love God. The chief principle of divine love is stated in no uncertain terms: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The ultimate source of our discipline must be God Himself.

Our thoughts naturally oblige the gravity of self, such that they rarely ever escape its orbit. In order for our thoughts to fly away from self, a greater attraction must act on the mind. That greater attraction must be none other than God Himself.

Discipline apart from God profits the soul nothing. Our greatest need is God, not discipline. The discipline of the mind is simply a means to love God truly and more fully. For all our discussion on discipline, we fail if we miss this most vital purpose.

VITALITY OF THE SPIRIT

If we know God truly, it is only because God first made Himself known by the Holy Spirit. The regenerate heart worships God in response to His self-revelation, and this is the work of the Spirit. God alone makes God known, because man’s mind is naturally blind.

The Spirit is crucial to our right reception of God’s revelation, both initially and continuously.

All holy thought comes from a mind disciplined on the truth of the Holy Spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16-17 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

There is nothing more nourishing to the mind than the gospel. If health of mind interests you, then the gospel is your greatest medicine. While the gospel cannot medicate the brain, it most certainly nurses the soul.

THE GOSPEL JUSTIFIES BY THE SPIRIT

Romans 2:29 - But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

THE GOSPEL SANCTIFIES BY THE SPIRIT

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - 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. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

SANCTIFICATION

Galatians 3:3 - Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Galatians 4:19 - My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

Simply stated, sanctification is transformation by grace in the gospel to make much of Christ.

Sanctification describes the process whereby a sinner becomes increasingly set apart from all that he was and becomes increasingly all that he is in Christ. It is a way of explaining conformity to Christ (Romans 8:29), or what theologians have called, “Christiformity.”

A CHANGE OF PERSON, NOT JUST BEHAVIOR

2 Corinthians 3:18 - And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Sanctification is the change of a person, not simply a change of their behavior.

This change is internal, not external.

Loving God is not simply the changing of outward behavior. It is not comprehended in conformity to an external standard. Loving God comes only by transformation of the mind.

A DEVELOPING SPIRIT THROUGH A DYING FLESH

Galatians 3:2-3 - Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

But even the transformation of sanctification is not the ultimate goal. The goal is the glory of God through the love and delight that our transformed hearts exercise towards God.

SANCTIFICATION PRODUCES GOD-CENTERED LOVE

Galatians 5:13 - For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Galatians 5:17-22 - For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love ...

UNION WITH CHRIST

Colossians 3:1-3 - If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Romans 6:1-5 - What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

True religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; or in the apostle's phrase, "it is Christ formed within us."¹

Sanctification is only possible for those who are in Christ, Christ being in them.

¹ Henry Scougal, *The Works of the Rev. H. Scougal* (London: Ogle, Duncan, and Co., 1822), 3.

PRIDE

Romans 12:1-3 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Philippians 2:1-5 - So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Self-reliance is anti-dependence—and that is pride. Self-reliance does not treasure Christ or relationship with Him. The proud Christian (which should scream contradiction) is more interested in achievement than relationship—more in morality than love to God.

Jerry Bridges suggests that “Our first problem is that *our attitude toward sin is more self-centered than God-centered*. We are more concerned about our own “victory” over sin than we are about the fact that our sins grieve the heart of God. We cannot tolerate failure in our struggle with sin chiefly because we are success-oriented, not because we know it is offensive to God.”²

Pride is not only a direct affront to God, it corrupts obedience.

GRACE RUNS DOWNHILL

James 4:6 - But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

1 Peter 5:5 - Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

² Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges Collection (NavPress, 1996), 16.

PRIDE _____ SIN

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PRIDE _____ SIN

Pride does not hate sin, it hates its consequences.

SOWING AND REAPING

Galatians 6:7-8 - Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Romans 8:5-11 - For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

ABIDING AND OBEYING

John 15:4 - Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

1 John 4:13 - By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

The Spirit unites us to Christ so that we are in Him and He is in us. But the gift of this relationship must be stewarded in love. Sanctification is a becoming more *like* Christ, for those who are *in* Christ. Now I want to show that the discipline of the mind is especially important for growing in fellowship *with* Christ. The abiding and obeying of our minds is essential to growing in our love to God, and this can only happen in the Spirit.

While our *union* with Christ cannot increase, our *communion* can.

WALKING

2 Corinthians 5:7 - for we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ

Galatians 5:16 - But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 4:17 - Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

Colossians 2:6 - Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

SEEKING CHRIST

Ephesians 4:11-13 - And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

1 Corinthians 2:2 - For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

To say that we are seeking the power of Christ simply means that we are deliberately pursuing the power that comes only through Christ by His Spirit in order that we may seek Christ Himself.

We should remember that the Spirit makes much of Christ, not the Spirit. Therefore, discerning the Spirit's power in you necessarily yields a greater pursuit of Christ.

Christians are to use their minds to discern and guard from deception. We are explicitly instructed that statements made on behalf of God need to be tested (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Add to this one of the clearest tests furnished by God has to do with the identity and nature of Christ (1 John 4:1-3). On this Graham Cole writes, "Any claimed experience of the Spirit that detracts from the dignity of Christ as truly God and truly human and from the integrity of his saving work is not of the Spirit ... Does the experience preach Christ?"³ The point is that the Spirit is Christ-centered (John 15:26; 16:14). Therefore, seeking His power is seeking the enablement to think Christ-centered thoughts. After all, the Spirit is the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). He always shines His illuminating light on Christ (John 15:26; 16:13). The Spirit makes us Christians, not Spiritains. Christ is at the center, not the Spirit. This character of the Holy Spirit is what Cole calls, "the magnificence of divine selflessness."⁴ This provides a crucial test for the work of the Spirit in our minds.

The ultimate source of our discipline must be God Himself. This is the preciousness of the gift of the Holy Spirit, God Himself within us. And the ultimate goal of our discipline is God Himself.

³ Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 274.

⁴ Ibid., 281.