

XXII.

The Holy Spirit in the Passion of Christ.

“Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself.”—*Heb. ix. 14.*

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Thirdly—Let us now trace the work of the Holy Spirit in the *suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ* (see “First” and “Second,” pp. 93 and 97).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the apostle asks: “If the blood of goats and calves and the ashes of the heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works?” adding the words: “Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” The meaning of these words has been much disputed. Beza and Gomarus understood the Eternal Spirit to signify Christ’s *divine nature*. Calvin and the majority of reformers made it to refer to the Holy Spirit. Expositors of the present day, especially those of rationalistic tendencies, understand by it merely the tension of Christ’s human nature.

With the majority of orthodox expositors we adopt the view of Calvin. The difference between Beza and Calvin is that already referred to. The question is, whether as regards His human nature Christ substituted the inworking of the Son for that of the Holy Spirit; or did He have the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit?

At the present time many have adopted the former view without clearly understanding the difference. They reason thus: “Are the two natures not united in the Person of Jesus? Why, then, should the Holy Spirit be added to qualify the human nature? Could the Son Himself not do this?” And so they reach the conclusion that since the Mediator is God, there could be no need of a work of the Holy Spirit in the human nature of Christ. And yet this view must be rejected, for—

First, God has so created human nature that without the Holy Spirit it can not have any virtue or holiness. Adam’s original, righteousness was the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit as truly as the new life in the regenerate is today. The shining-in of the Holy Spirit is as essential to holiness as the shining of light into the eye is essential to seeing.

Second, the work of the Son according to the distinction of three divine Persons is other than the work of the Holy Spirit with reference to the human nature. The Holy Spirit could not become flesh; this the Son alone could do. The Father has not delivered all things to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works from the Son but the Son depends upon the Holy Spirit for the application of redemption to individuals. The Son adopts our nature, thus relating Himself with the whole race; but the Holy Spirit alone can so enter into individual souls as to glorify the Son in the children of God.

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Applying these two principles to the Person of Christ, we see that His human nature could not dispense with the constant inshining of the Holy Spirit. For which reason Scripture declares: “He gave Him the Spirit without measure.” Nor could the Son according to His

own nature take the place of the Holy Spirit; but in the divine economy, by virtue of His union with the human nature ever depended upon the Holy Spirit.

As to the question, whether the Godhead of Christ did not support His humanity, we answer: Undoubtedly; but never independently of the Holy Spirit. We *faint* because we resist, grieve, and repel the Holy Spirit. Christ was always victorious because His divinity never relaxed His hold upon the Holy Spirit in His humanity, but embraced Him and clave unto Him with all the love and energy of the Son of God.

Human nature is limited. It is susceptible of receiving the Holy Spirit so as to be His temple. But that susceptibility has its limits. Opposed by eternal death, it loses its tension and falls away from the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Hence we have no unlosable good in ourselves, but only as members of the body of Christ. Apart from Him, eternal death would have power over us, would separate us from the Holy Spirit and destroy us. Wherefore all our salvation lies in Christ. He is our anchor cast within the veil. As to the human nature of Christ, it encountered and passed through eternal death. This could not be otherwise. If He had passed only through temporal death, eternal death would still be unvanquished.

To the question how His human nature could pass through eternal death and not perish, having no Mediator to support it, we answer: The human nature of Christ would have been overwhelmed by it, the in-shining of the Holy Spirit would have ceased if His divine nature, *i.e.*, the infinite might of His Godhead, had not been underneath it. Hence the apostle declares: “Who through the *Eternal Spirit* offered Himself”; not through the *Holy Spirit*. The two expressions are not identical. There is a difference between the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Godhead, *apart from* me, and the Holy Spirit *working within* me.

The word of Scripture, “He was full of the Holy Ghost,” refers not only to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but also to His work in man’s soul. So with reference to Christ, there is a difference between: “He was conceived by the Holy Ghost,” “The Holy Ghost descended upon Him,” “Being full of the Holy Spirit,” “Who offered Himself by the Eternal Spirit.” The last two passages indicate the fact that the spirit of Jesus had *taken in* the Holy Spirit and *identified* itself with Him, in almost the same sense as [Acts xv. 28](#): “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost *and to us*.” The term “Eternal Spirit” was chosen to indicate that the divine-human Person of Christ entered into such indissoluble fellowship with the Holy Spirit as even eternal death could not break.

A closer examination of the sufferings of Christ will make this clear.

Christ did not redeem us by His sufferings alone, being spit upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified, and slain; but this passion was made effectual to our redemption by His *love* and *voluntary* obedience. These are generally called His *passive* and *active* satisfaction. By the first we understand His actual bearing of pain, anguish, and death; by the second, His zeal for the honor of God, the love, faithfulness, and divine pity by which He became obedient even unto death—yea, the death of the cross. And these two are essentially distinct.

Satan, *e.g.*, bears punishment also and shall bear it forever; but he lacks the willingness. This, however, does not affect the validity of the punishment. A murderer on the gallows may curse God and men to the end; but this does not invalidate his punishment. Whether he curses or prays, it is equally valid.

Hence there was in Christ's sufferings much more than mere passive, penal satisfaction. Nobody compelled Jesus. He, partaker of the divine nature, could not be compelled, but offered Himself quite voluntarily: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God; in the volume of the book it is written of Me." To render that voluntary sacrifice He had with equal willingness adopted the prepared body: "Who being in the form of God thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"; "Who, tho He were a Son, yet learned He obedience." And to give highest proof of this obedience unto death, He inwardly consecrated Himself to death, as He Himself testified: "I sanctify Myself for them."

This leads to the important question, whether Jesus rendered this obedience and consecration outside of His human nature, or in it, so that it manifested itself in His human nature. Undoubtedly the latter. The divine nature can not learn, or be tempted; the Son could not love the Father with other than eternal love. In the divine nature there is no *more* or *less*. To suppose this is to annihilate the divine nature. The statement that, "tho He were the Son, yet learned He obedience," does not mean that as *God* He learned obedience; for God can not obey. God rules, governs, commands, but never obeys. As King He can serve us only in the form of a slave, hiding His princely majesty, having emptied Himself, standing before us as one despised among men. "Tho He were the Son" means, therefore: altho in His inward Being He is God the Son, yet He stood before us in such lowliness that nothing betrayed His divinity; yea, so lowly that He even learned obedience.

Wherefore if the Mediator as man showed in His human nature such zeal for God and such pity for sinners that He willingly gave Himself in self-sacrifice unto death, then it is evident that His human nature could not exercise such consecration without the inworking of the Holy Spirit; and again that the Holy Spirit could not have effected such inworking unless the Son willed and desired it. The cry of the Messiah is heard in the words of the psalmist: "I delight to do Thy will, O God." The Son was willing so to empty Himself that it would be possible for His human nature to pass through eternal death; and to this end He let it be filled with all the mightiness of the Spirit of God. Thus the Son offered Himself "through the Eternal Spirit that we might serve the living God."



Hence the work of the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption did not begin only at Pentecost, but the same Holy Spirit who in creation animates all life, upholds and qualifies our human nature, and in Israel and the prophets wrought the work of revelation, also prepared the body of Christ, adorned His human nature with gracious gifts, put these gifts into operation, installed Him into His office, led Him into temptation, qualified Him to cast out devils, and finally enabled Him to finish that eternal work of satisfaction whereby our souls are redeemed.

This explains why Beza and Gomarus could not be fully satisfied with Calvin's exposition. Calvin said that it was the working of the Holy Spirit apart from the divinity of the Son. And they felt that there was something lacking. For the *Son* made Himself of no reputation and became obedient; but if all this is the work of the Holy Spirit, then nothing is left of the work of the Son. And to escape from this, they adopted the other extreme, and declared that the Eternal Spirit had reference only to the Son according to His divine nature—an exposition that can not be accepted, for the divine nature is never designated as spirit.

Yet they were not altogether wrong. The reconciliation of these contrary views must be looked for in the difference between the *existence of the Holy Spirit without us*, and *His working within us as received by our nature and identified with its own working*. And inasmuch as the Son, by His Godhead, enabled His human nature, in the awful conflict with eternal death, to effect this union; therefore the apostle confesses that the sacrifice of the Mediator was rendered by the working of the Eternal Spirit.



XXIII.

The Holy Spirit in the Glorified Christ.

“Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”—*Rom. i. 4.*



From the foregoing studies it appears that the Holy Spirit performed a work in the human nature of Christ as He descended the several steps of His humiliation to the death of the cross.

The question now arises, whether He had also a work in the several steps of Christ's exaltation to the excellent glory, *i.e.*, in *His resurrection, ascension, royal dignity, and second coming.*

Before we answer this question let us first consider the nature of this work in the exaltation. For it is evident that it must greatly differ from that in His humiliation. In the latter His human nature suffered *violence*. His sufferings antagonized not only His divine nature, but also His human nature. To suffer pain, insult, and mockery, to be scourged and crucified, goes against human nature. The effort to resist such sufferings and to escape from them is perfectly natural. Christ's groaning in Gethsemane is the natural utterance of the human feeling. He was burdened with the curse and wrath of God against the sin of the race. Then human nature struggled against the burden, and the cry, “Father, let this cup pass from Me,” was the sincere and natural cry of horror which human nature could not repress.

And not in Gethsemane alone; through His whole humiliation He experienced the same, tho in less degree. His self-emptying was not a single loss or bereavement, but a growing poorer and poorer, until at last nothing was left Him but a piece of ground where He could weep and a cross whereon He could die. He renounced all that heart and flesh hold dear, until, without friend or brother, without one tone of love, amid the mocking laughter of His slanderers, He gave up the ghost. Surely He trod the winepress alone.

His humiliation being so deep and real, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit succored and comforted His human nature so that it was not overwhelmed. For it is the proper work of the Holy Spirit by gifts of grace to enable human nature, tempted by sorrow to sin, to stand firm and overcome. He animated Adam before the fall; He comforts and supports all the children of God today; and He did the same in the human nature of Jesus. What air is to man's physical nature, the Holy Spirit is to his spiritual nature. Without air there is death in our bodies; without the Holy Spirit there is death in our souls. And as Jesus had to die, tho He was the Son, when breath failed Him, so He could not live according to His human nature, tho He was the Son, except the Holy Spirit dwelt in that nature. Since, according to the spiritual side of His human nature, He was not dead as we are, but was *born* possessed of the life of God, so it was impossible for His human nature for a single moment to be without the Holy Spirit.

