

# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

LESSON  
FOUR

IN THE BELIEVER



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Conversion</b> .....	<b>2</b>
A. Regenerating	2
B. Convicting	4
1. Preponderance of sin	6
2. Repulsiveness of sin	7
3. Offensiveness of sin	8
4. Hopelessness of sin	8
C. Justifying	9
D. Sanctifying	11
<b>III. Christian Living</b> .....	<b>12</b>
A. Indwelling	13
B. Sanctifying	15
C. Interceding	18
D. Preserving	19
<b>IV. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>22</b>

# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

## Lesson Four

### In the Believer

#### INTRODUCTION

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In the days of ancient Israel's kingdom, King David created the plans to build God's temple. He even collected many of the materials necessary to build and adorn the temple, especially its precious metals and jewels. But the actual building of the temple was left to David's son Solomon. And once Solomon had completed the temple, the glory of the Lord filled it, and the Lord caused his name to dwell there perpetually.

God's work in the life of believers is a bit like this. God the Father planned our salvation. His son the Lord Jesus accomplished the work necessary to save us. And the Holy Spirit fills and dwells in us, ensuring that the Father's plans and the Son's work are manifested in our lives forever. In fact, in Paul's first letter to the churches in Corinth, the apostle directly compared believers to the temple specifically because the Holy Spirit lives within us.

This is our fourth lesson in the series *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*. We've entitled this lesson "In the Believer," because we'll be looking at the Holy Spirit's work of applying salvation to individual believers.

Salvation is a fully Trinitarian work. In simple terms, the Father planned our salvation. He's the judge whose wrath had to be appeased by Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. And he's the one who grants salvation to us by grace, through faith, and in Christ. The Son is the one who became incarnate as Jesus. And he accomplished our salvation through his perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection and ascension. But it's primarily the Holy Spirit who applies the various elements of salvation to the lives of believers.

In systematic theology, the Holy Spirit's work of applying salvation to believers is generally treated as part of soteriology, which is the doctrine of salvation. Soteriology is often treated in two major parts, commonly known by their Latin titles. On the one hand, *historia salutis*, or the "history of salvation," is God's saving events and actions that accomplish salvation for his people. As we've seen in prior lessons, the Holy Spirit has always played an important role in *historia salutis* through his many works of providence. On the other hand, *ordo salutis*, meaning the "order of salvation," is the logical and chronological order in which the Holy Spirit applies the various aspects of salvation to individual believers. Since this lesson focuses on the Holy Spirit's work in applying salvation to believers, we'll primarily be dealing with aspects of the *ordo salutis*.

We'll consider the Holy Spirit's work in the believer under two major headings. First, we'll explore his initial application of salvation during our conversion, when we're first saved. And second, we'll explain his ongoing application of salvation in our Christian living. Let's look first at the Spirit's work during conversion.

## CONVERSION

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The word “conversion” refers to changing from one thing into another. In some Christian traditions, conversion is a well-defined event that occurs when a person comes to saving faith. But in this lesson, we’ll use the term more generally to refer to the beginning stages of salvation, regardless of how a person experiences them.

**Every conversion story is a little bit different, so we dare not put everybody into a category and say it must be this way. But whatever happens, it’s the work of the Holy Spirit drawing us, wooing us, convicting us of sin, causing us to see our need of salvation, and then giving us the actual faith — which is trusting in Jesus — that we need to be able to be saved.**

— Rev. Mike Osborne

We’ll consider four aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work at the time of conversion. First, we’ll address his regenerating work in our spirits. Second, we’ll focus on his convicting us of sin. Third, we’ll speak of the Spirit’s justifying work that results in forgiveness and righteousness. And fourth, we’ll mention the initial aspects of his sanctifying power in our lives. Let’s begin with the Holy Spirit’s regenerating work.

## REGENERATING

The word “regeneration” means “recreation” or “rebirth.” In formal theology, it’s “the event in which a human being moves from a state of spiritual death into a state of spiritual life.” All people enter the world in a state of spiritual death. And we remain spiritually dead unless and until the Holy Spirit regenerates us. We inherit our spiritual deadness from Adam, the first human being. When he sinned in the Garden of Eden, God cursed all humanity to both physical and spiritual death. At that moment, Adam and Eve became spiritually corrupt. And this spiritual corruption is the essence of spiritual death. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul referred to this as our “sinful nature.” He described it by saying that sin lives inside our very bodies and even takes control of our minds.

Moreover, spiritual death affects all the naturally conceived descendants of Adam and Eve. As Paul indicated in Romans 5:12-19, Adam was our representative before God. So, we all share in his guilt, and in its consequences of physical and spiritual death. Passages like John 3:5-7, Romans 8:10, and Colossians 2:13 confirm that every human being comes into this world spiritually dead. Only Jesus avoided this curse, as we read in Hebrews 4:15, and 7:26.

Now, even when we’re spiritually dead, our souls still animate our bodies. And we continue to think, feel, dream, make choices, and engage with the world. But as a result of our spiritual corruption and death, human beings are morally incapable of pleasing God. We have no capacity to please him or merit his blessings. We don’t love

him. We don't have faith in him. Everything we do flows from our sinful hearts and motives. We justly deserve his wrath, and desperately need salvation.

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine of the Canons of Dort, produced in 1619, summarize the problem of spiritual death this way:

**All people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.**

As Paul put it in Romans 8:6-8:

**The mind of sinful man is death ... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).**

This is a terrible situation for humanity. But it's also why regeneration is so important.

**Regeneration is a theological term, which refers to — and I want to use Wayne Grudem's words here — that “secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life [in] us.” So, regeneration is a supernatural work of God's spirit. It is about renewing and transforming the heart into divine likeness. It is a change in the life of a sinner. A regenerated person is the one whose spiritual death has been brought to spiritual life. Regeneration is a distinguished mark of a true believer. Regeneration is the activity of God in changing people's hearts. The prophet Ezekiel uses the words like “the heart of stone is removed and is substituted by the heart of the flesh.”**

— Rev. Canon Alfred Sebahene, Ph.D.

In regeneration, our souls pass from spiritual death into spiritual life. We see this passage from death to life in places like John 5:24, Ephesians 2:4, 5, and Colossians 2:13. And in other places, Scripture describes this process in terms of rebirth. As Jesus said in John 3:3-6:

**No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... [N]o one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:3-6).**

The Greek adverb *anōthen* translated “again” in the phrase “born again,” can also be translated “from above.” And in this case, both meanings are true. We receive a second birth — the birth of our spirit — from above, that is, from the Holy Spirit. Of course, all human beings have spirits that animate our bodies. But only believers have

spiritual *life*, because only believers have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Listen to what Paul said in Titus 3:5:

**[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).**

In some translations, the Greek word *paliggenesia*, translated here as “rebirth,” is rendered “regeneration,” which is another perfectly legitimate translation.

When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he gives life to our spirits and inclines us toward God. As Paul taught in Romans 6:4-14, our regeneration is also our death to sin, and our freedom from sin’s mastery.

Some Evangelical traditions believe that only after we exercise saving faith, will the Holy Spirit regenerate us. Others argue that an unregenerate person can’t possess or exercise saving faith, and therefore, that regeneration must logically come first. But we should all agree that regeneration is a gracious and miraculous work that overturns the normal workings of the natural world. When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he raises the dead by giving life to our spirits. And he changes our very nature as human beings, restoring our moral ability, and giving us new hearts that want to please God.

**A born again heart is one that has got the Spirit’s life pulsing in it and showing us God in a new way so that we see he is gracious to us. And he comes to us as Father in our great need, in our great need of mercy and grace. And so, he comes to us this way and it inclines us; we love him. And it’s who we want to serve at our deepest, and it becomes definitive now for our new identity. And I think it is defined by a new love or a new master that we will serve.**

— Dr. Mark Saucy

Having looked at conversion in terms of the Holy Spirit regenerating our spirits, let’s talk about his work of convicting us of sin.

## CONVICTING

In theology, the term “conviction” identifies the “awareness of the guilt and wrongness of our sin.” Jesus explicitly taught about the Spirit’s convicting work in John 16:8-11, where we read these words:

**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 me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:8-11).**

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin in order to drive us to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The Spirit begins by making us aware of our sin, so that we acknowledge our guilt. He leads us to agree that we justly deserve God's wrath. He produces in us contrition or brokenness over the wrong that we've done. And he leads us to confess and repent of our sin, in the hope of receiving forgiveness and salvation in Jesus.

Conviction is one of the Holy Spirit's first works when he calls unbelievers to faith. Now, the Spirit calls and convicts many people in ways that fall short of salvation. People can be called to repentance and faith, genuinely recognize their sinfulness, and still not turn to Christ. For instance, in Isaiah 59:12, the prophet described God's sinful covenant people this way:

**Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities  
(Isaiah 59:12).**

The people were convicted insofar as they recognized and acknowledged their sin. But in verse 20, the Lord declared:

**The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their  
sins (Isaiah 59:20).**

It wasn't enough for the people to be called to faith and to feel convicted. In order to be redeemed, they also had to repent.

But when we speak of the Spirit's convicting work as part of conversion, we're thinking about those in whom the Spirit's call is "effectual" — in whom his gracious influence produces true repentance and salvation. This is a special work that doesn't just prepare us to hear the gospel, but that actually applies salvation to us.

We find a good example of this type of conviction in Peter's sermon in Acts 2. On the first Pentecost after Christ's ascension into heaven, Peter preached the gospel to a large crowd of Jews that had gathered in Jerusalem. And the Holy Spirit savingly convicted many of them of their sin, with the result that thousands came to faith. Listen to Luke's account in Acts 2:37-41:

**When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said ...  
"Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized  
..." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with  
them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who  
accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were  
added to their number that day (Acts 2:37-41).**

The phrase cut to the heart describes what we've called "conviction," which resulted in 3,000 people being saved that day.

When Peter called the crowd to repent and be baptized, he confirmed what we've been saying about saving conviction. It's entirely possible that some who heard Peter's words were convicted in a general sense, but not as a saving work of the Spirit, so they refused to repent and be saved. But those in whom the call was effectual experienced



*saving* conviction. They acknowledged and confessed their sin, were genuinely sorrowful over it, and were moved to repentance and baptism.

We can see that conviction and repentance are a work of the Spirit in the church's response to the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household. Prior to Cornelius' conversion, the church consisted entirely of Jews. So, in Acts 10:44, 45, the Jewish believers were surprised when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his household. But, when they heard the news about Cornelius and his household, they praised God for the Gentiles' salvation. Listen to what the church said in Acts 11:18:

**God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).**

By quoting these words favorably, Luke recognized that the church was right — conviction and repentance are part of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Saving conviction can be described in a variety of ways. But for our purposes, we'll consider four common elements. First, the Holy Spirit's convicting work makes us aware of the preponderance of our sin.

## **Preponderance of sin**

Fallen human beings — and even redeemed human beings — don't just sin occasionally. We sin all the time. We think sinful thoughts; we say sinful words; we do sinful things. As we read in Ecclesiastes 7:20:

**There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20).**

And as the apostle John said in 1 John 1:8:

**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).**

We find similar ideas in Genesis 8:21, Romans 3:23, James 3:2, and many other places.

Worse, it's not just that we all sin. It's that we all sin *a lot*. In Psalm 40:12, David wrote that his sins were more than the hairs on his head. And he was a man after God's own heart! So, the sins of unbelievers are even more numerous. Because of this, part of the Holy Spirit's saving work of conviction is to make us aware of how sinful we really are. He shows us how badly, and how often, we sin.

**It's fascinating that as early as Genesis 6:5, we're told that the very imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts — and "heart" being the core of the personality — is "only evil continually." That means, in fact, that we humans are controlled by a selfish desire for accomplishment, achievement, possession, and that thing warps everything we do. You cannot understand human behavior if you**

**assume that humans are naturally good. In fact, as you look at the history of the race, you have to say, no, we're not naturally good; we're naturally, evilly self-centered.**

— Dr. John Oswalt

A second common aspect of the Spirit's saving conviction is that it makes us sensitive to the repulsiveness of sin.

## **Repulsiveness of sin**

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, he shows us that our sin isn't just an oversight of some sort, or a technical mistake. It's repugnant, detestable, sickening. It's a foul corruption that rots our bodies and our souls. It's so awful that it required the death of God's only Son to save us from it.

Speaking of Israel's sin in Isaiah 64:6, the prophet Isaiah said that the people had become unclean. Even the works they thought were righteous were nothing but filthy rags. And as a result of their sin, the people were wasting away. And Jesus' rebuke of the lawyers and Pharisees was similar. In Matthew 23:27, he compared them to whitewashed tombs full of corpses and filth.

In Romans 7, Paul helped to explain how sin's repulsiveness can work toward our repentance and salvation. In the context of that chapter, he taught that God's holy, righteous and pure law incites sin in unbelievers. But it does this in such a way that the Holy Spirit can use it to reveal how disgusting sin really is. In Romans 7:13, Paul explained:

**In order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful (Romans 7:13).**

Here, Paul said that "what was good" and "the commandment" — both referring to the law — revealed the sinfulness of sin.

In many ways, unregenerate human beings are comfortable with sin. We tend to see ourselves as mostly good, and we downplay our moral shortcomings and failures. And there are many reasons for this. Sin is familiar, so we're content with it. Sin justifies the wrong we do, so it makes us feel better about ourselves. Sin offers to fulfill our desires, so it's appealing. But the core reason we accept sin is that we ourselves are sinful. And far from hating ourselves, we tend to use ourselves as the standard by which we judge the rest of the world. We don't see things as God does, and we don't agree with his morality. So, part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to get fallen human beings to see what God sees. In conversion, the Spirit opens our eyes so that we view sin the way God does — as a horrible corruption of the true, the beautiful, and the good.

A third aspect of the Holy Spirit's saving work of conviction is that it makes us aware of the offensiveness of sin to God.

## Offensiveness of sin

Under the Holy Spirit's convicting work of salvation, sinners come to realize that their sin offends God's holy character, violates his holy law, and justly deserves his wrath. Listen to just a few examples of this from Scripture. In Ezra 9:6, Ezra prayed:

**I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens (Ezra 9:6).**

In Isaiah 59:12, the prophet confessed:

**Our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities (Isaiah 59:12).**

And in Jeremiah 14:7, Jeremiah prayed:

**Our sins testify against us, O Lord ... For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you (Jeremiah 14:7).**

It's this aspect of conviction that makes us realize our lost and condemned state. We discover that God's justice is real, and that our sin has put us on the wrong side of it, so that we stand condemned, and can expect his wrath and punishment.

The fourth common aspect of the Holy Spirit's saving conviction we'll mention is that it shows us the hopelessness of sin.

## Hopelessness of sin

Sin puts us in a position of hopelessness because it makes us incapable of pleasing God or of earning his blessings. Because of sin's corruption, we can't do anything to please God, let alone to save ourselves. This is why Paul called us "powerless" in Romans 5:6.

**Humanity's fall into sin completely affected our ability to please God. Before the Fall, everything that Adam did — this is interesting to think about — everything that Adam did was pleasing to God, except eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But once that sin was committed, and once our lives were affected in our heart, mind, soul, entire being, everything that we do now is sinful. And so, not even the righteous actions that we take, or what we would call "righteous" actions, are free of sin... And so, the Fall is complete. And without the gracious work of Christ, there is nothing that we can do ultimately that will please and honor our God.**

— Dr. Jeff Lowman

Because sin puts us in this hopeless condition, we're completely dependent on God's grace for forgiveness and salvation. This is why the writers of Scripture insisted that salvation is by grace, and not by works. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9:

**It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

It's the Holy Spirit's convicting work that leads us to this understanding. It causes us to despair of seeking salvation through our own merit, and makes us recognize our helplessness apart from God's mercy and grace. As a result, it drives us to repentance, believing in faith that God will forgive our sins and receive us as his beloved children in Christ.

Now that we've addressed conversion in terms of the Holy Spirit regenerating our spirits and convicting us of sin, let's look at his work of justifying us.

## JUSTIFYING

In Protestant theology, the technical term “justification” refers to God's “legal declaration acquitting a sinner from the guilt of his or her sin and crediting him or her with the righteousness of Christ.” The term “justification,” the related verb “justify,” and also the words “righteous” and “righteousness,” come from a family of words related to the Greek verb *dikaioō* (δικαιόω). Throughout the New Testament, these words regularly refer to God's act of forgiving sinners and declaring them to be righteous in his sight. We see this in Romans 3:30; 4:5; 5:1, 9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:8, 11; and many other places.

Moreover, the New Testament consistently teaches that sinners are justified, or declared righteous, by means of faith, on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice on our behalf. As just one example, in Romans 3:22-24, Paul wrote:

**This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... [They] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:22-24).**

In systematic theology, we generally think about justification in terms of Christ's work. After all, it's his atoning death that provides the legal basis for our forgiveness. And it's his resurrection that provides the righteous standing and new life we share after we're forgiven. But the Holy Spirit also plays an important role in our justification. Christ's work was historical — once for all time. But sinners have needed justification all throughout history — before, during and after the time of Christ. And it is the Holy Spirit that solves this problem by applying the justifying benefits of Christ's work to believers in every time period.

Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:11:

**You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11).**

Paul affirmed that we're justified in the name of Jesus, meaning that we're declared righteous on the basis of his authority and saving work. But he also said that we're justified in or by the Spirit, because he's the one that applies justification to us. We see something similar in Romans 14:17, where Paul said:

**The kingdom of God is ... a matter of ... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).**

Our righteousness, or justification, is based on Christ's atonement on our behalf. But we experience it in the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is the divine person who applies it to us.

In his letter to Titus, Paul associated the Holy Spirit's work of applying justification to us with our regeneration. He said that our justification wasn't based on our righteousness, but on Christ's. And he indicated that the Holy Spirit applied Christ's righteousness to us as part of his work of conversion, contemporaneously with our regeneration. We see this idea in Titus 3:5-7, where Paul wrote:

**[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit ... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).**

Paul first said that we were "saved ... by the Holy Spirit." So, when he said that we'd been justified, he meant that the Spirit's saving work includes justification.

Theologians often describe justification in terms of its negative and positive elements. On the negative side, justification cancels, or negates, our guilt by forgiving our sins, so that we're no longer subject to God's condemnation. The Holy Spirit's involvement in forgiving our sins is mentioned, as we read earlier, in 1 Corinthians 6:11, and Titus 3:5. Both of these verses speak of the Spirit "washing" us to cleanse us from sin.

And on the positive side, justification declares us to be righteous in God's sight, so that we have a right to an eternal inheritance along with all its associated benefits. Listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:13-14:

**Having believed, you were marked in [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14).**

The inheritance Paul had in mind included all the blessings of salvation, many of which he had just listed in Ephesians 1:4-12. In those verses, he mentioned things like holiness, adoption as sons, redemption, forgiveness, the riches of God's grace, and the

fulfillment of all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Every one of these things is part of our inheritance in Christ. And every one of them is guaranteed to us by the Holy Spirit.

So far we've considered conversion by looking at the Holy Spirit's regenerating us, convicting us of sin, and justifying us. So, now let's turn our attention to the initial aspects of his sanctifying work.

## **SANCTIFYING**

In simple terms, sanctification is “the act of making people and things holy.” The Spirit's sanctifying work includes setting people and things apart for God's use, purifying them, and making them fit to be near God's unveiled glory.

**When the Bible describes God as holy, it's actually going after a concept that primarily means God is distinct and separate. So, the holiness of God is emphasizing the fact that God is divine and that all the attributes and characteristics we associate with God as distinct from human beings, the creatures he has made. And in an analogous way, therefore, when we talk about holiness of individuals, we're talking about people who become separate from sinfulness to become more like the God who they wish to serve.**

— Dr. Simon Vibert

Scripture uses the word “sanctification” in different ways. And correspondingly, theologians recognize multiple types or aspects of sanctification. The kind of sanctification the Holy Spirit applies to us at conversion is sometimes called “definitive sanctification,” because it's a one-time event rather than an ongoing process. At our conversion, the Holy Spirit sets us apart and purifies us by uniting us to Christ. And because Jesus himself is perfectly sanctified — perfectly pure and without sin — we become sanctified, too. Listen to what our Lord said in John 17:19:

**For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified (John 17:19).**

Jesus' sanctification is necessary to our sanctification because ours flows from his. And in 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul wrote:

**Christ Jesus ... has become ... our ... holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30).**

Several other New Testament passages also address this idea, including 1 Corinthians 6:11, and Hebrews 10:10.

Through definitive sanctification, our Lord Jesus becomes the source of our spiritual life and strength now, and later our physical life in the general resurrection. We can see this in many ways in Scripture. For example, in John 15:1-5, Jesus compared

himself to a vine, and believers to the vine's branches. And his point was that our spiritual union causes his life to flow through us. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-17, Paul said that our bodies are members of Christ himself, and that we're also one with him in spirit. And we find similar ideas in the metaphor of the human body that Paul used in places like Ephesians 4:15, 16, where he said that Christ is the head and believers are his body.

These organic aspects of sanctification change what we do, how we think and feel, what we want, and what we love. They impart new life, new freedoms and new abilities to us. For instance, they free us from sin's tyranny, enabling us to resist the sin that always overcomes unbelievers.

In Romans 6–8, Paul talked extensively about the new life we receive when we come to faith. He said that we die to sin and to sin's mastery. And, as a result, we gain the abilities to resist sin and to obey God. Listen to how he described this change in Romans 7:5-6:

**When we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us ... we serve in the new way of the Spirit (Romans 7:5-6).**

And in Romans 8:9, he added:

**You ... are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you (Romans 8:9).**

In definitive sanctification, the Holy Spirit remakes us in ways that sin can't overcome, so that we're free to become more and more like Christ.

We all know many people that could benefit from a new start. Sometimes we've handled a relationship poorly. Or we've made bad mistakes at a job. Or we might even have gotten into trouble with the law. Well, something similar is true of unbelievers in their relationship to God. When we enter this world, we're already corrupted by sin and condemned by God. But conversion gives us a new start. It's a remarkable time when the Holy Spirit gives us new life, new brokenness over our sin, a new standing before God, and a new heart to obey him joyfully. And it's the obligation of every believer to be thankful for this new start, and to live in ways that are consistent with the new life and calling we've been given.

Having explored the Holy Spirit's work in our conversion, let's turn to his continual role throughout our individual Christian living.

## **CHRISTIAN LIVING**

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As we've just seen, there are several aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in believers that he only does when we're first saved. And these never need to be repeated. He only needs to regenerate our spirits once. Although he constantly convicts believers of sin,

only during our conversion does he do this in a way that drives us to receive Christ as our Savior. He only applies justification to us once, and after we've been justified we never lose our justified status. And the same thing can be said about our new life in definitive sanctification. But many other aspects of the Spirit's work continue throughout our lives as believers.

In this lesson, we'll mention four aspects of our ongoing salvation or Christian living that rely on the Holy Spirit. First, we'll mention the Spirit indwelling us. Second, we'll speak of the continuing aspects of his sanctifying work. Third, we'll see that he works by interceding on our behalf. And fourth, we'll focus on his preserving us to secure our final salvation. Let's look first at his indwelling presence.

### INDWELLING

The Holy Spirit's indwelling can be defined as his "special presence within, and spiritual union with, believers." As God, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent — he exists everywhere throughout creation at the same time. But he doesn't manifest his presence the same way at all places and times. And his indwelling of believers is one of the most personal, intimate and powerful ways he manifests his presence.

One of the most amazing facts about salvation is that God himself lives inside us. Once the Spirit sanctifies us at our conversion, we become worthy vessels for his presence. And because he loves us so much, and because he's determined to influence our hearts and minds for the better, he lives within us and never leaves us.

When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he doesn't simply repair our spirits and then leave us to our own devices. Rather, he takes up residence within us. We see this in places like 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Timothy 1:14, and James 4:5. And it's his indwelling presence that actually gives life to our spirits. Listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:9-11:

**If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:9-11).**

Here, Paul indicated that Christ indwells us through his Holy Spirit. And it's the Spirit's indwelling presence that gives us spiritual life now, and physical resurrection in the future.

The Scriptures also speak of a ministry of the Holy Spirit that is closely related to his indwelling, which the New Testament calls the filling of the Holy Spirit. Different branches of the church understand the filling of the Spirit in different ways. But we can all agree on at least two things. First, the Holy Spirit always indwells true believers. And second, his filling, or the level of his influence in our lives, varies. From time to time he fills us and influences us more powerfully than at other times. This is why the Scriptures



never command us to be indwelt by God's Spirit, but they do command us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. As the apostle Paul put it in Ephesians 5:18:

**Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).**

When the Holy Spirit fills us, he exercises great, and sometimes overwhelming, influence over us. Our hearts overflow with joy, thankfulness and love for fellow Christians. Or as Paul put it in Galatians 5:22, 23, we see the fruit of the Spirit in great measure.

Through the filling and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers are empowered to perform works that God approves, just as Paul taught in Romans 8:5-9. We're also able to worship rightly, approaching God in genuine submission, and appealing to him earnestly and honestly. As Jesus said in John 4:24:

**God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).**

And as Paul put it in Philippians 3:3:

**We ... worship by the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3).**

Unbelievers are certainly capable of worshipping God outwardly. They can render prayers, bring offerings, sing, preach and teach. But they can't do these things in ways that God finds acceptable. Their hypocrisy, sin, and spiritual deadness prevent their worship from pleasing him. But with the indwelling Spirit, believers are able to approach him through the Spirit's internal leading and prompting, and in ways that properly acknowledge and honor God's persons, works and attributes.

Now, we should point out that Christians sometimes have the mistaken idea that the Holy Spirit only began to indwell believers in the New Testament age. But believers in the Old Testament were certainly regenerate. And that could only be true because the Holy Spirit indwelt them, too. And many other things that were true of Old Testament believers also depended on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: They had faith. They performed works acceptable to God. They worshiped rightly. And they had the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. There are certainly aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry that are richer in the New Testament. But indwelling believers has been part of his task in every age.

In addition to this, the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence also grants believers insight into God's revelation. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16:

**We have ... received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for ... he cannot understand them ... But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).**

As we discussed in an earlier lesson, theologians often identify two types of spiritual insight that are associated with the Holy Spirit. Illumination is:

**a divine gift of knowledge or understanding that is primarily cognitive**

And inward leading is:

**a divine gift of knowledge or understanding that is primarily emotive or intuitive**

In both cases, it's the indwelling of the Spirit that grants us this insight into God's revelation and intentions toward us.

**The Holy Spirit is given to believers as a resource, as the power of God in their lives, as the wisdom, the “mind of God” in their lives, as the presence of God in their lives because, of course, the Holy Spirit is God... Jesus said when his Spirit came — this is in the end of the Gospel of John — that it would convict the world of sin and righteousness and guide the apostles, and by extension believers, into all truth. So, the Spirit functions in our life as a companion from God to guide our lives. And so, we all experience times when we feel as though the Spirit ... that God is speaking to us, that God is asking us to do this or that or not to do this or that. And that's a real relationship, an actual person-to-person relationship that God has with the believer.**

— Dr. Alan Hultberg

Now that we've talked about the Spirit's indwelling presence in the context of our Christian living, let's explore his ongoing sanctifying work.

## **SANCTIFYING**

As we mentioned earlier, we can speak of sanctification in different ways, including the definitive sanctification we receive at conversion. But there is another aspect or type of sanctification that, for our purposes in this lesson, we'll refer to as “ongoing sanctification.” We undergo this type of sanctification throughout our lives because our ongoing sin constantly requires forgiveness and cleansing.

Every believer sins. In fact, we do it every day. If you think you don't, then you haven't thought hard enough about what God requires you to believe, to say, to do, and even to be. But the good news is that whenever we sin, the Holy Spirit is ready to apply forgiveness to us, and to cleanse us from the effects of sin's unrighteousness. That doesn't mean we won't sin again, or that we'll escape the earthly consequences of our

sin. But it does mean that God is continuing to love us, and continuing the saving work he began when he first regenerated us.

When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he doesn't completely remove sin's corruption and influence from our lives. As Paul explained in Romans 7:14-25, the sin that lives in us still battles with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Scripture describes this struggle in terms of war in places like Romans 7:23, Galatians 5:17, and 1 Peter 2:11. But the good news is, the Spirit dwells in us and works in us. So, even though we continue to stumble because of sin's influence, we also do good works because of the Spirit's influence. As Paul put it in Philippians 2:13:

**It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).**

**God has provided for us in the Holy Spirit the answer to the “why” and the “how” question of our pursuit of obedience. The “what” question — “What should we do to please God?” — is answered by the commands of the Bible, Old Testament and New. But we wrestle with the question, “Why?” Why should I? What would make me want to obey God? And Paul says it's the Holy Spirit who draws me to reflect on grace, draws me to love Christ, and it's the Holy Spirit who gives me the desire. But when I *want* to act in a way that pleases God, then I still face this other question, “How can I?” because I find weakness in myself. Paul explores that in depth in Romans 7, describing the dilemma, the frustration of an individual who knows that God's law is right, agrees that it is good, but finds something else at work in himself and is frustrated ... unable to do what God has called him to do, and what he wants to do. In Romans 8, Paul gives the answer to that, that even though the law was weak, it could only give commands, but couldn't change our hearts, God, by the Holy Spirit, has now set us free, that we *can* obey through the death of Christ and through the power of the Spirit, as we walk by the Spirit. The righteous requirement of the law is being fulfilled in us because we're walking not according to the flesh — our own unaided human nature — but in the power of the Spirit. That's what Paul encapsulates in that little phrase in Philippians 2. He's at work “both to will and to act for his good pleasure.”**

**— Dr. Dennis E. Johnson**

Our ongoing sanctification is a process through which the Holy Spirit continually applies forgiveness and cleansing to us when we sin, and continually turns us away from sin and toward righteousness. Ideally, this process should make us more and more obedient to God over the course of our lives. Scripture refers to this lifelong improvement as “maturity” in Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 4:12, Hebrews 5:14, and many other places. As just one example, in James 1:4 we read:

**Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete (James 1:4).**

Through the Holy Spirit's influence, this process of maturing produces spiritual results in the lives of believers.

Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of fruit is often used to describe these results. We see this in John the Baptist's condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:8-10. We find it in Jesus' teachings about true and false obedience in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:16-20. It's a key part of Jesus' teachings about good works in John 15:1-16. And as we mentioned earlier, in Galatians 5, Paul described specific fruit the Spirit manifests in the lives of those he indwells. Listen to what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:17-25:

**The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature... [T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:17-25).**

Paul's discussion of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 resembles his teachings in Romans 6–8. In both places, he contrasted the different influences the Spirit and sin have on our desires. And he explained that the only way to obey God from the heart, and to manifest righteous characteristics, is to be indwelled by the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes Christians wrongly equate the fruit of the Spirit with spiritual gifts. As we saw in a prior lesson, the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to each believer in the New Testament. But the fruit of the Spirit is the obedient living the Spirit produces in all believers. So, it should be relatively similar in all our lives.

Now, as we think about the Spirit's ongoing work of sanctification in believers, we should mention that some theological traditions refer to a process of "progressive sanctification." This term refers to the idea that we progress in holiness, becoming more and more godly throughout our Christian lives. It's certainly true that Christians *should* progressively get more spiritually mature, and that we should produce more and more fruit. But even true believers can fail to grow in this way. Listen to how Peter described these aspects of sanctification in 2 Peter 1:5-9:

**Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he ... has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:5-9).**

Peter's list of sanctified qualities looks a lot like Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. And he did say that these characteristics should be increasing in our lives. In other words, they *should* be progressive. But he also admitted that, through our own fault, even believers can lack this fruit.

**The Bible tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who produces the desire and the action of his goodwill, but we also read in Scripture — in different parts — that we are commanded to make every effort. We are commanded to be diligent in our sanctification, so what we can see is that the Holy Spirit produces in us desires and also produces in us the ability to do what God wants. However, the believer must respond, striving, using the means of grace, being always alert and vigilant to resist the temptation so that he will be able to grow in the grace of the Lord.**

— Dr. David Correa, D.Min., translation

Having spoken of the Holy Spirit's role in our Christian living in terms of his indwelling presence and our ongoing sanctification, let's briefly mention his interceding on our behalf.

### **INTERCEDING**

Intercession is the Holy Spirit's work of "petitioning the Father on behalf of believers." It's similar to what human beings do when we defend someone who is being threatened or harmed; or when we ask someone to offer aid to another; or when we pray for someone's healing, forgiveness or blessing. Listen to Paul's description of the Spirit's intercession in Romans 8:26-27:

**The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27).**

Sometimes when Scripture speaks of God knowing our hearts, it carries a threat of judgment. We see this in places like Jeremiah 4:14, 1 Corinthians 4:5, and Hebrews 4:12. But in the case of *believers*, Christ has taken away our condemnation. So, when the Spirit searches *our* hearts, it's always for our benefit. He sees the needs we can't express, and expresses them for us. He sees the sin we don't even recognize, and appeals for forgiveness on our behalf. He prays for us in precisely the way we ought to pray but don't. And this intercession is always successful. Why? Because, as Paul said, the Spirit always intercedes in accordance with God's will. And to that, we might add that the Father always honors the prayers of the Spirit because the Spirit is himself God.

Now, that doesn't mean our lives are free from sin, pain and difficulty. After all, the Spirit knows why the Father planned these things for our lives, and he wouldn't intercede to undo that plan. But the Spirit also knows, just as Paul explained just a few lines later in Romans 8:28-30, that God is using all the bad things in our lives for our good. He's using them to complete our sanctification, and to bring us into a wonderful, everlasting inheritance in Christ.

Prayer is a remarkable thing, isn't it? God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, the Perfect and Holy One listens to us, and even responds to us by intervening in our lives. And he doesn't do it because he has to, but because he wants to. He loves to hear our praises and thanks. He generously forgives us when we confess our sins. And he responds to our petitions with concern and wisdom. But every believer has times when our hearts and heads are so full that we simply can't express ourselves well in prayer. Every believer has times when our hearts and heads are so stubborn that we simply refuse to pray as we should. And every believer has times when our ignorance of our incomprehensible God and of his inscrutable ways prevent us from approaching him as he deserves. So, isn't it comforting to know that whether we're at our best or our worst, the Holy Spirit himself prays on our behalf?

So far, we've explored Christian living by looking at the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence, his work of ongoing sanctification, and his interceding for us. Now let's turn our attention to his work of preserving believers for our final salvation.

## PRESERVING

Preservation is the Holy Spirit's "continuous, gracious work of ensuring that believers persevere in faith until our salvation is complete." The Holy Spirit's preserving work flows from his indwelling presence, so that our hearts remain faithful to God. This doesn't mean that we never doubt or sin. But it does mean that our salvation is secure, because the Spirit maintains saving faith within us. Listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:11-14:

**If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you... [I]f by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:11-14).**

Paul taught that if the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and indwells us, then he also leads us. And if he leads us, then we are permanently sons of God, and he will ultimately raise our bodies in glory.

When we come to faith in Christ, our salvation is secure forever. This isn't because God has promised to save us no matter what we do. Rather, it's because the Holy Spirit preserves us. He makes sure that true believers actively remain in the faith, and never finally and completely abandon Christ. As Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6:

**He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).**

We know that the Spirit began our salvation during our conversion. So we have assurance that he will continue to apply salvation to us until our glorification at Jesus' return. We find this same idea in places like Galatians 3:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and 1 Peter 1:3-5.

**One of the great truths of our salvation is what we call “the perseverance of the saints” — although Spurgeon liked to refer to it as “the perseverance of the *Savior*,” and that the Savior persevered on our behalf, and because we’re in him, we’re secure in him. And I don’t disagree with that at all. Yet, there is a subjective side to perseverance wherein the Spirit of God steps in and uses, really, what the Puritans used to call “practical means” to ensure that we persevere in terms of our experience. So, how does he do that? ... Well, he does that in this loving, gentle, quiet way, always, though, using the Word to guide us. And that’s why we speak in the Reformation tradition of “the Word and the Spirit” — the Word and the Spirit, the Word and the Spirit — always working in beautiful harmony to take us to the end goal that God has for our salvation.**

— Dr. Danny Akin

Another very common way Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit’s preserving work is through the language of a legal seal. In the ancient world, a seal was often a ring or other device that could be pressed into wet clay or wax, or even metal, in order to leave a physical impression. This impression functioned much like a signature, so that it authenticated and authorized the document or object to which it was applied. For example, Matthew 27:66 mentions that when Jesus was buried, the Romans put a seal on the stone so that they would know if anyone had disturbed Jesus’ body in its tomb.

In the case of the Holy Spirit, he functions as God’s seal of ownership, demonstrating that those who possess the Spirit truly belong to God. And no one can take them away from God. In some ways, this resembles the practices of ancient servanthood. For instance, Exodus 21:6 describes the practice of piercing a servant’s ear to mark him as a servant for life. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit seals believers with God’s ownership. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:22:

**[God] set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 1:22).**

When God seals us with the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t just mark us as his possession. He also *guarantees* that the salvation that we’ve begun to experience will eventually come to us in all its fullness. And unlike seals and marks in ancient servanthood, God’s seal doesn’t just mark us as *servants*. It also marks us as his children and heirs. Listen to how Paul combined these ideas in Ephesians 1:13-14:

**Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession (Ephesians 1:13-14).**

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive God’s promise that guarantees not just the future completion of our salvation, but also our “inheritance.” An inheritance isn’t what a servant receives from his master. It’s what a child receives from his father.

And that inheritance will be our final salvation — our *glorification*, which the Holy Spirit will apply to us when Jesus returns. Glorification includes the resurrection of our bodies to an incorruptible, immortal state. As we’ve seen, Paul talked about this in Romans 8:11-14. But he went into even more detail throughout 1 Corinthians 15. For example, in verses 37-44, he compared our existing bodies to seeds. Correspondingly, he compared our resurrected bodies to the plants that grow from those seeds. Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

**The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).**

Our powerful, glorified bodies will have been remade by the Holy Spirit so that they’re morally and physically perfect. They will be incapable of dishonor and sin, and impervious to sickness and death. In fact, as Paul went on to teach in 1 Corinthians 15:48, 49, our resurrected bodies will be just like the glorified body that Jesus received when he was resurrected. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

**We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).**

Our glorification will be our final state, when we are completely free from the presence, influence and effects of sin in both our bodies and our souls, and when we finally enter into the glorious blessings of the new heavens and new earth.

The preserving work of the Holy Spirit, and the perseverance it produces in our lives, should give us tremendous confidence and peace. God’s Spirit lives inside us, ensuring that the salvation we’ve already begun to experience will never end. And he will eventually bring us into even greater blessings, including our total freedom from sin’s presence and effects, and our ultimate resurrection in glory. If we truly believe the gospel, we never need to fear that our salvation might be lost. Instead, we can — and *should* — rest in the promise that the Spirit will be faithful to complete the work he began.



## CONCLUSION

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In our lesson on the Holy Spirit in the believer, we've explored conversion by looking at the Spirit's work of regenerating, convicting, justifying and sanctifying us. And we've considered his role in Christian living by looking at his indwelling, sanctifying, interceding for and preserving believers.

In this series on pneumatology, we've explored the deity, person and work of the Holy Spirit. We've paid particular attention to the different aspects of his involvement in the Trinity, the world, the church, and the believer. And we've seen that the Spirit is the person of the Trinity who most directly engages with creation, and most directly impacts our lives. If we remember how important his ministries are, and how present with us he is, and if we *rely* on those things, we'll be better prepared to navigate the difficulties and stresses of life. And we'll be much more aware of how good our God is, and of how much thanks, praise and loyalty he deserves.

**Dr. Ramesh Richard (Host)** is Founder and President of RReach, a global proclamation ministry that seeks to evangelize leaders and strengthen pastors around the world. He is also Professor of Global Theological Engagement and Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Richard received his Th.D. in Systematic Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Delhi. In 2008, Dr. Richard was the keynote speaker for the 23rd Annual International Prayer Breakfast at the United Nations. He is also the founder of Trainers of Pastors International Coalition (TOPIC) and the general convener of the 2016 Global Proclamation Congress for Pastoral Trainers.

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**Dr. Danny Akin** is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Dr. David Correa, D.Min.** is Pastor of Jesus Presbyterian Church and Director of the Youth Ministry Institute at San Pablo Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Merida, Mexico.

**Dr. Alan Hultberg** is Associate Professor of Bible Exposition and New Testament at Talbot School of Theology.

**Dr. Dennis E. Johnson** is Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Seminary California.

**Dr. Jeff Lowman** is Senior Pastor at Evangel Church PCA in Alabaster, Alabama and Professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology at Birmingham Theological Seminary.

**Rev. Mike Osborne** is Associate Pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Orlando, FL.

**Dr. John Oswalt** is the Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Mark Saucy** is Professor of Theology and Theology Department Chair at Talbot School of Theology.

**Rev. Canon Alfred Sebahene, Ph.D.** is Dean at St. John's University in Tanzania.

**Dr. Simon Vibert** is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.