

The Means of Union and Fellowship with Christ The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification – Direction 4

Direction 4: The means or instruments by which the Spirit of God accomplishes our union with Christ, and our fellowship with Him in all holiness, are the gospel, by which Christ enters into our hearts to work faith in us, and faith, by which we actually receive Christ Himself, with all His fullness, into our hearts. And this faith is a grace of the Spirit, by which we heartily believe the gospel and also believe on Christ as He is revealed and freely promised to us in this, for all His salvation.

Thesis: Employ the means God has given: the Gospel and Faith.

God reveals “two means or instruments by which His Spirit accomplishes the mystical union and fellowship between Christ and us, and which rational creatures are capable of attaining to, by His Spirit working in them.”

I. The Gospel

- A. The Gospel makes known to us the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8) and the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).
 - 1. The Gospel invites and commands us to believe on Christ for salvation and encourages us by free promise of that salvation to all who believe on him (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9, 11).
 - 2. This is the means God has given us, “in which he sends Christ to us to bless us with his salvation (Acts 3:26).”
- B. The Gospel is the means by which we receive the Spirit and righteousness (2 Cor. 3:6, 8, 9).
- C. Faith comes by hearing the Gospel and so it is the great means whereby we are begotten in Christ and Christ is formed in us (Rom. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19).
 - “The Word is near us, the gospel, the word of faith in which Christ Himself graciously condescends to be near us, so that we may come at Him there without going any further, if we desire to be joined with Him” (Rom. 10:6-8).

II. Faith

- Faith is the instrument of reception, “by which the union between Christ and us is accomplished on our part by our actual receiving Christ Himself with all His fullness in our heart.”
- A. The Nature of Faith
 - 1. Faith is not a mere intellectual exercise; it is not merely understanding or merely agreeing with what we believe to be true.
 - 2. The faith by which we are justified is faith in Christ’s blood (Rom. 3:24-25), which is his death, in fulfillment of prophecy, for his own.
 - 3. So faith is more than mere understanding, it is to apprehend Christ and his salvation in line with the Scriptural promises. As such, it must contain two acts:
 - a. Believing the truth of the Gospel, by which you receive the means to receive Christ.

- b. Receiving Christ and his salvation, by which you receive Christ himself and his salvation.
 - c. The first is like taking a cup; the second is like taking a drink from the cup.
4. Believing in Christ must not and cannot be forced or constrained
- a. It cannot be forced by agreement to the truth (James 2:19). Wicked men or devils may be brought to this even though they may wish it were false.
 - b. It cannot be constrained out of fear of damnation, “without any hearty love and desire towards the enjoyment of Him; but we must receive the love of the truth by relishing the goodness and excellency of it” (2 Thess. 1:10; Phil. 3:8, 9), esteeming Christ to be all our salvation and happiness (Col. 3:11) and the one in whom all fullness dwells (Col. 1:19).
5. Both these acts must be accompanied by unfeigned love for the truth. This love to Christ in truth involves love of two things:
- a. Forgiveness of Sins – which inclines us to the second act.
 - b. Holiness
 - (1) We must desire earnestly that God would create in us a clean heart and right spirit, as well as hide His face from our sins (Ps. 51:9, 10); not like many that care for nothing in Christ but only deliverance from hell.
 - (2) Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matt. 5:6).
- B. [Note: Marshall explains in detail the nature of saving faith. I have edited that out because (a) we have covered that in detail before, and (b) our focus on this study is the role of the gospel and faith in sanctification. If you would like to read Marshall on this, let me know and I will send a link or a hard copy of this chapter.]
- C. The Proper Use of Faith
1. Rejection of the errors regarding faith
 - a. Faith alone is sufficient to receive Christ, but insufficient to receive holiness.
 - b. Faith alone is sufficient to receive Christ, but it tends toward licentiousness.
 - c. Faith alone is sufficient to receive Christ’s righteousness, which we must then employ for our own sanctification and to keep our salvation.
 2. Scriptural proof that through faith we not only receive Christ, but his fullness, which includes not only justification and union with Christ, but also holiness of heart and life through fellowship with him.
 - a. By faith we have the actual enjoyment and possession of Christ Himself, and not only of remission of sin, but of life, and so of holiness (Eph. 3:17; Gal. 2:19-20; 1 John 5:12-13; John 3:36; 5:24. These texts express clearly such a faith as I have described. Therefore the efficiency or operation of faith, in order to the enjoyment of Christ and His fullness, cannot be the procurement of a bare right or title to this enjoyment; but rather it must be an entrance to it, and taking possession of it. We have our access and entrance by faith into that grace of Christ in which we stand (Rom. 5:2).
 - b. The Scripture plainly ascribes this effect to faith: that by it we receive Christ, put Him on, are rooted and grounded in Him; and also that we receive the Spirit,

remission of sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26, 27; Col. 2:6, 7; Gal. 3:14; Acts 26:18).

- c. Christ, with all His salvation, is freely given by the grace of God to all that believe on Him, for we are saved by grace through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9; cf. Acts 2:38; Rom. 3:24-25; 11:6).
 - d. The accomplishing of union with Christ is the first work of saving grace in our hearts. And faith itself, being a holy grace and part of spiritual life, cannot be in us before the beginning of it; but rather it is given to us and wrought in the very working of the union.
 - e. True saving faith, such as I have described, has in its nature and manner of operation a peculiar aptitude or fitness to receive Christ and His salvation, and to unite our souls to Him, and to furnish the soul with a new holy nature, and to bring forth a holy practice by union and fellowship with Him. God has fitted natural instruments for their office, as the hands, feet, etc., so that we may know by their nature and natural manner of operation for what use they are designed.
3. Faith is the fitting instrument for receiving and practicing holiness through our union and fellowship with Christ.
- a. By the very act of hearty trusting or believing on Christ for salvation and happiness, the soul casts and puts away from itself everything that keeps it at a distance from Christ as well as all confidence in things other than Christ because such confidences are inconsistent with our confidence in Christ for all salvation.
 - b. There is in this saving faith a natural tendency to furnish the soul with a holy frame and nature, and all endowments necessary to it, out of the fullness of Christ.
 - c. Because faith has such a natural tendency to dispose and strengthen the soul for the practice of holiness, we have cause to judge it a suitable instrument to accomplish every part of that practice in an acceptable manner.

III. Concluding thoughts: Why holiness through the Gospel and Faith is not as easy as it sounds.

- A. Such union with Christ and resulting holiness is not within our natural power.
- B. Sanctification and holiness is more than a mere restoration to original holiness, as Adam in the Garden.
- C. The work of new creation is worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel to produce faith and self-denial. We are passive and then active but the power of the Spirit.