

*Like the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit works in the everyday things of the believer's life. His gentle, undemanding voice echoes in the common events of human experience: the joys, questions, and struggling of personal interaction; fulfillment and frustrations of the workplace; exquisite trials of family life; and in the constant challenge for the believer to draw nearer to God through Christ. The Spirit does not berate. He does not force us to listen. Oh, on occasion He does wield His mighty two-by-four to get our attention. His ministrations can, at times, be both abrupt and painful. But usually (after the pattern of the Father's proffered salvation) He speaks quietly, inviting us to learn humility and righteousness through His gentle yet pointed life-lessons.*



**A**s the percussive cadence of construction reverberates overhead, the thoughts of this writer turn inward. From the temporal perspective, what was before a last-gasp kitchen—crumbling around the edges, disintegrating silently inside cabinets and appliances—is now on its way to becoming something new, efficient, solid, and beautiful. But as the space has passed through the phase of deconstruction and removal, passed through the floor repair phase, then into its present phase of rewiring and new drywall, the parable of its renovation has been written on the heart.

### **Death Before Life**

God has set the pattern of things. From the very beginning of human time, it was set in place that there must be death before life.

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. (Genesis 4:3-5a)

As difficult as it may be for the modern mind to comprehend, God requires that blood be shed—that something dies—for man to enjoy a right relationship with Him. Man is born with the *capacity* for knowing God, but not the means. Man is born with an old, degenerate life. For him to reach up to God and actually find Him, something must die as a stand in for the sin with which he is born. Before Christ, blood was shed repeatedly—the Old Testament is awash with it—by the sacrifice of pristine beasts.

"If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. He shall slay the young bull before the Lord; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar..." (Leviticus 1:3-5a)

In Christ, however, we have the one, final sacrifice. The blood shed at the cross was sufficient for *all* sin—personal, corporate, past, present, future. Blood still had to flow to stand in for sin, but now it was accomplished for all time in just the one event. Something still had to die—this time in the person of God Himself—but now the record of depravity would be expunged for all time, for all people.

Thus the new life the believer has in Christ comes as the result of the forfeit of His. Just as the planted seed must die before the new plant can spring up, so too must the flesh die before there can be the new life in Christ.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

## Life Before Death

This new life is also called "sanctification," and has two facets. The first is the *fait accompli* of the believer's eternal life with God.

...and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

The second is the ongoing process of the believer becoming more and more like Christ.

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Fill me with life anew,  
That I may love what Thou dost love,  
And do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Until my heart is pure,  
Until my will is one with Thine,  
To do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Till I am wholly Thine,  
Until this earthly part of me  
Glow with Thy fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
So shall I never die,  
But live with Thee the perfect life  
Of Thine eternity.*

*(Edwin Hatch)*

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13 niv)

At the cross, Jesus died for man's sin—once for all, finished. Daily, however, we must "die to sin," offering ourselves as living sacrifices, useful instruments of righteousness in the hands of the Father.

Though some inherent corruption remains, for we are still of corruptible flesh, we cannot superimpose the new life over the old. Whether by purposeful design or attrition, the old must be swept out of a sanctified life. The two uncomfortably coexist.

Before we could enjoy our brand-spanking new kitchen, we had to destroy the old. Everything had to be removed down to the bare studs and joists. All the old appliances were removed, the sink and faucet, all the old cabinets, the flooring, ceiling, and light fixtures. Even the old switches and outlets were removed. Everything of the old had to be removed, and deposited in the dumpster.

Had we combined our new, light-colored kitchen cabinets with the darker, 1970s-era old cabinets, the result would be an eyesore. Had we added some of the new, granite counter tops to some of the old Formica, the result would be an unworkable mess. And what sense would it make to install a new counter top and sink, but retain the old, leaking faucet? No, the only right, effective solution was to thoroughly tear out the old to make room for the new. Right down to the studs.

Just so, the solution for an effective sanctified life is to let the Spirit root out and tear away every vestige of the old life to make room for the new. Just as we, on that first morning, opened the door to the contractor and his crew, the believer must open the door to the Holy Spirit's ministry of continual, cleansing sanctification.