



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 146

Subjective soteriology – Though Christ’s objective work of salvation was completed at the cross (John 19:30), with the primary focus being God the Father, rendering perfect satisfaction to Him (John 4:34; Hebrews 2:17), it does not mean that all aspects of the work of salvation were completed. Obviously Christ’s work does have application to sinners, for He came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Only when the objective work of Christ is applied to sinners, is there then a change in their lives (Ephesians 1:13). This aspect of the work of salvation is internal to man. Theologians refer to this as subjective soteriology, the subjective application or communication of the merits of Christ to sinners.

As expressed in the study of the doctrine of Trinity, though each person of the Trinity is jointly involved and active in every external work of God, yet they are active differently, accomplishing their own distinctive functions in that activity. Scripture ascribes some of the operations more particularly to one person, and some to the other persons of the Trinity. For example, in the work of salvation God the Father planned salvation and sent His Son into the world to redeem His people (John 3:16; Galatians 4:4); God the Son came and accomplished redemption for His people (John 4:34; 6:38; 17:4); and God the Spirit applies salvation to sinners (John 3:5-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2). This is all part of the covenant of redemption, made among the members of the Godhead. The Scriptures particularly ascribe the application of Christ’s work of salvation to the Holy Spirit, who commits to applying the redemption purchased by Christ to those for whom it was intended (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4-7).

Operations of the Holy Spirit – To properly understand this redemptive work, it is important to first briefly outline the various aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in creation and also in the lives of believers. The Old Testament describes the Holy Spirit as being active in the work of creation, bringing order to the unordered universe (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 33:6); as being the source, power and continuance of life (Job 33:4; Psalm 104:29-30); demonstrating God’s presence in creation (Psalm 139:7); empowering certain people for service (Exodus 35:30-33; Numbers 11:24-45; Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 16:13); protecting God’s people from their enemies (Isaiah 63:11-12; Haggai 2:5); imparting wisdom and revelation (Nehemiah 9:20, 30; 2 Samuel 23:1-2; Micah 3:8; Zechariah 7:12; Acts 1:16; 28:25; 1 Peter 1:10-11); and bringing about inward renewal in believers (Psalm 51:10-12; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The same is true with respect to the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, though it is revealed with greater detail and clarity, and with much greater measure and extent in the people of God. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write the New Testament (John 16:13; Ephesians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:21); gave wisdom and guidance to the apostles and other early believers for ministry and the proclamation of the gospel; and enabled and empowered them to perform great signs and miracles (Mark 13:11; John 14:26; Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:8; 6:3; 8:29, 39-40; 11:12, 28; 13:2-4, 9-11; 15:28; 16:6-7; 20:22-23; 21:11; Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 2:4; Galatians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 1:12). We read that the Holy Spirit regenerates and renews believers (John 3:5-8; 6:63; Titus 3:4-7); He illuminates and guides them (Romans 8:4, 14; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16; Galatians 5:16-18, 25); fills them with love, joy, peace and comfort (Acts 9:31; Romans 5:5; 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6); sanctifies them, cultivating the fruit of holy living (Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-23); intercedes for them (Romans 8:26-27); and empowers and gives them spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12).

Not all the works of the Holy Spirit pertain to the work of redemption. Therefore theologians distinguish between the general and special operations of the Holy Spirit. Regarding these Berkhof writes that, “[In the sphere of creation] He originates, maintains, develops and guides the life of the natural creation ... [in the sphere of redemption or re-creation] He originates, maintains, develops, and guides the new life that is born from above, is nourished from above, and will be perfected above.” In the next study we will look at the order of salvation, and the various elements involved in how God applies salvation to people.