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## Chapter 5.7

# God's Power for *Virtue Apologetics*

## *God the Holy Spirit in Us*

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### **Overall Objective**

To establish the fact and reasons that Christians have a unique supernatural power to be virtuous.

### **Table of Topics**

- A) The Power of Our Relationship with God**
- B) The Power of the *Holy Spirit* in Us**
- C) The Power of Jesus Christ in Us**

*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- Christ living in Christians (cf. Gal 2:20) and God working in us (cf. Phil 2:13) obviously give Christians a moral superiority.
- The fact that we alone possess the *Holy Spirit*, and all others only have a *sinful* nature, explains our superior ability for exercising the fruits of the Spirit (i.e. virtues).
- Our New Nature is to love and live righteousness. It gives us both a unique *desire* to be virtuous, and a *power* to be so, that spiritually unregenerate people simply do not have.
- Only the Christian *can, does, & desires* to fight sin.
- By virtue of the Holy Spirit's regeneration, the born again Christian is, from a moral, spiritual, and epistemological perspective, *a different species of human being*, a "**new creation**" (2 Cor 5:17), "**created . . . to do good works**" (Eph 2:10), and "**created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness**" (Eph 4:24).
- Simply put, God lives inside of Christians, and only inside of Christians. Like Christ, we too are an incarnation of God.
- The temples that God lives in now are not the kind that are designed to hide the presence and glory of God.
- "Changing from good to bad is impossible for us."

If God expects superior virtue to be the ultimate proof of the Christian faith, we would expect Him to give those possessing such truth a unique ability to demonstrate such virtue. The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that Christians do indeed have a superior and unique ability to exercise such moral virtues. As the early Church leader Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 310-386) wrote concerning supernatural virtue: "If you have [saving] faith you will not only receive remission of your sins, you will also do things beyond human power."<sup>1</sup>

## A) The Power of Our Relationship with God

The first reason for the born again Christian's moral superiority is the significant difference in their relationship with God. The King was communicating this very thing when He claimed:

**I am the [true spiritual] vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing"** (John 15:5).

As pointed out elsewhere, the "**fruit**" that the King was referring to was essentially righteousness (cf. v. 10) and love (cf. v. 12-13).<sup>2</sup> Christ is the source of all genuine virtue, and without Him you will not produce it. And it is because Christians uniquely have the King, that they uniquely have virtue.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the Apostle Paul claimed something that only a born again Christian can when he wrote: "**I no longer live, but Christ lives in me**" (Gal 2:20). If that is the unique condition of every Christian then we would certainly expect unique and superior virtue.

It is also because of our unique relationship with God that the remarkable promise in Philippians 2:13 only applies to the regenerated Christian as well: "**[I]t is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His good [moral] purpose**" (Phil 2:13). There is no such promise in Scripture that God is working in unbelievers to cause them to both desire and act virtuously, but if such is the case with born again Christians, then we would obviously expect a significant superiority in virtue among them.

## B) The Power of the *Holy Spirit* in Us

The born again Christian's superior ability to exercise supernatural virtue is more specifically based on the fact that they uniquely possess the *Holy Spirit*. The fruits of the Spirit, "**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**" (Gal 5:22-3), are essentially moral virtues. There is no doubt that the

Holy Spirit-indwelled Christian is much more capable of producing these virtues than any unregenerate human.

The Apostle also speaks of the unique and superior way that the Holy Spirit works in the Christian's life to produce supernatural virtue when he remarks: "**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed [by God] into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit**" (2 Cor 3:18). Only those indwelled with the Holy Spirit are undergoing such moral transformation.

The Apostle clearly describes the moral difference between believers and unbelievers when he writes that the regenerate are uniquely: "**God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works**" (Eph 2:10). We have been recreated for the express purpose of *virtue apologetics*.

Later in Ephesians, the Apostle explains the great difference that exists between the regenerated and unregenerated in terms of moral discernment and ability:

**So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup>They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.**

**<sup>20</sup>You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.**

**<sup>21</sup>Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:17-24)**

Although the unregenerate have a conscience (cf. Rom 2:14-15), it is constantly and severely impaired and repressed by the sinful nature and desires that rule within them. Therefore, their moral "**thinking**" is an exercise in "**futility**" (v. 17), their moral "**understanding**" is "**darkened**" (v. 18), they have "**lost all sensitivity**" to "**every kind of impurity,**" and have "**a continual lust for more**" immorality (v. 19).

The born again Christian, however, is recreated with a radically different moral makeup. They have been given something that the unregenerate do not possess: a New Nature, "**created [past tense] to be like God in true righteousness and holiness**" (v. 24). While the Christian is still responsible to "**put on the new self**" (v. 24), the

choice between it and the "old self" (v. 22) is not between two equally attractive ways of life, but rather, our recreation has drastically altered our moral tastes such that instead of having "a continual lust for more" (v. 19) immorality, we have a continual lust for righteousness. That is our New Nature, to love and live righteousness. It gives us both a unique *desire* to be virtuous, and a *power* to be so, that spiritually unregenerate people simply do not have.

In Romans 8 the Apostle also vividly illustrates all of this. In essence, he makes it clear that the unregenerate possess *only a sinful nature*, while *only* the regenerate possess the *Holy Spirit*. Only the Christian has supernatural power over sin, and has had their sinful nature dethroned. If this is true then the expected outworking of these facts clinches the matter, and we would expect moral superiority for the spiritually regenerated.

Let's look closer at what Paul says:

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** [a unique and superior spiritual standing], **because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. . . . And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.**

**Those who live according to the sinful nature** [all the unregenerate] **have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit** [Christians] **have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind [of all the unregenerate] 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.**

**You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.** (Rom 8:1-9)

The first thing to notice in this passage is that the Apostle is contrasting believers with unbelievers, not sinful or "carnal" believers with "Spirit-filled" believers. In other words, some may take this passage as an exhortation for the Christian to live in control of the Spirit instead of the sinful nature. While the Apostle addresses the real and present battle that the regenerated Christian has with sin elsewhere (cf. Rom 7:14-23; Gal 5:16-25), that is not his intention here.

Rather, the Apostle wishes to contrast the *power* over sin which the Christian has with the *bondage* to sin that the unregenerate have, all of which he has been discussing in the previous two chapters. This becomes clear when he emphatically tells the Roman Christians in verse 9 that, **"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [living in them], he does not belong to Christ."** In other words, the Apostle is saying that if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, and if you have the Holy Spirit then you *are* controlled by Him, not the sinful nature. This is not to say that Christians never allow sinful thinking to influence them, but the general course of their life will demonstrate the influence of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Backing up in the passage then, we see that the Apostle is describing all regenerated Christians as, **"free from the law of sin"** (v. 2), living **"in accordance with the [Holy] Spirit,"** having **"their minds set on what the [Holy] Spirit desires,** (v. 5) and having a, **"mind controlled by the [Holy] Spirit"** (v. 6).

The Apostle is obviously not implying that Christians live in sinless perfection, as just a few verses earlier he describes his own personal battle with sin. But even the difference illustrated in Romans 7:14-23 is that only the Christian consistently *can, does, and desires* to fight sin. Perhaps the *most* noticeable difference between the saved and damned is that the former experience a great deal of guilt and remorse over their sin, while the latter rarely do. Christians even have a holy response to their sin.

Accordingly, the Apostle describes the unregenerate **"Gentiles"** as, **Having lost all sensitivity [to right and wrong], they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more"** (Eph 4:19). A truly regenerated believer could simply never be described that way. Not only are regenerated Christians uniquely sensitive to sin, but they have a distaste for it that the unregenerate do not. Christians have both a unique desire and ability to be holy (cf. 1 John 2:15, 29; 3:6-9, 24; 5:18).

It should also be emphasized that it is not just any spirit that the Apostle is saying the Christian **"lives in accordance with,"** and is **"controlled"** by in Romans 8, but specifically the *Holy Spirit*. We can confidently conclude then that anyone possessed by the *Holy Spirit*, which is the sole possession of regenerated believers, will exhibit a greater degree of holiness than all the unregenerate who do not possess the *Holy Spirit*.

Accordingly, what the Apostle says in Romans 8 of the regenerate, can be compared to his description of the unregenerate. They can accurately, automatically, and universally be described as living, **"according to the sinful nature,"** having **"their minds set on what**

**that nature desires,”** and possessing a **“sinful mind”** that **“is hostile to God”** and that **“does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so”** (v. 5, 7).<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle is clearly claiming that the unregenerate *only* have a *sinful nature*, and that *only* the born again Christian has the *Holy Spirit*. If this is so, we would not only *expect* the truly regenerate of the world to practically, consistently, and convincingly demonstrate a superior holiness, but we believe that *they actually do*. By virtue of the Holy Spirit's regeneration, the born again Christian is, from a moral, spiritual, and epistemological perspective, *a different species of human being*, a **“new creation”** (2 Cor 5:17), **“created . . . to do good works”** (Eph 2:10), and **“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Eph 4:24).

Let us remember how the Apostle describes the unregenerate in Ephesians 2:

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.** (Eph 2:1-3)

More specifically, he says that instead of the *Holy Spirit* Who works in the Christian, it is the **“spirit”** of satan **“who is now at work”** in the unregenerate. That will obviously have a great moral significance.

Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote concerning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian:

There is no work so high and excellent; for there is no work wherein God doth so much communicate himself, and wherein the mere creature hath, in so high a sense a participation of God; so that it is expressed in Scripture by the saints "being made partakers of the divine nature," 2 Pet. 1:4, and "having God dwelling in them, and they in God," 1 John 4:12, 15, 16, and chap. 3:21; "and having Christ in them," John 17:21, Rom. 8:10; "being the temples of the living God," 2 Cor. 6:16; "living by Christ's life," Gal. 2:20; "being made partakers of God's holiness," Heb. 12:10; "having Christ's love dwelling in them," John 17:26; . . . they are made partakers of God's fullness, Eph. 3:17, 18, 19, John 1:16, that is, of God's spiritual beauty and happiness . . .

The true saints only have that which is spiritual; others have nothing which is divine, in the sense that has been spoken of. They not only have not these communications of the Spirit of God in so high a degree as the saints, but have nothing of that nature or kind.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, J. I. Packer has written concerning God's unique enablement for holiness in the Christian:

For healthy Christians, holiness is a[n] electric word. Why? Because God has implanted a passion for holiness deep in every born-again heart. Holiness, which means being near God, like God, given to God, and pleasing God, is something believers want more than anything else in this world. . . .

In Romans 6, Paul explains that all who have faith in Christ are new creatures in him. They have been crucified with him; this means that an end has been put to the sin-dominated lives they were living before. Also, they have been raised with him to walk in newness of life; this means that the power that wrought Jesus' resurrection is now at work in them, causing them to live differently because in truth they are different at the center of their being in what Paul in Romans 7:22 calls "my inmost self" and Peter in 1 Peter 3:4 calls "the hidden person of the heart."

They have been changed by the dethroning in them of that allergic negative reaction to the law of God, which is called sin, and the creating in them . . . a "heart after God"-a deep, sustained desire to know God, draw near to God, seek God, find God, love God, honor God, serve God, please God. . . . Holiness is the naturalness of the spiritually risen man, just as sin is the naturalness of the spiritually dead man, and in pursuing holiness by obeying God the Christian actually follows the deepest urge of his own renewed being. . . .

In one who has not been united to Christ in his dying and rising, motivational holiness is so unnatural as to be impossible, because at motivational level sin has the dominion all the time. "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Romans 8:7). Loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength is altogether beyond the unregenerate man's capacity.

But in one who is thus united to Christ, by faith from the human side and by the Spirit from the divine side, motivational holiness is spontaneous and natural, and the unnatural thing is for him to do violence to his renewed nature by yielding to the desires of the flesh (see Galatians 5:16-26)-which explains why backsliders are always so miserable inside.<sup>7</sup>

## **Pastoral Practices**

- The King did not come to merely rescue us from the penalty of sin, but its power as well. Nonetheless, many Christians live a rather defeated life because they do not realize the new power they have over sin. Consider giving teachings over Romans 6-8 or Galatians 5 in order to help them be more victorious.

## **C) The Power of Jesus Christ in Us**

Simply put, God lives inside of Christians, and only inside of Christians. The Apostle Paul wrote:

**What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.** (2 Cor 6:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19)

One thing that **"a believer"** *does not* **"have in common with an unbeliever"** is that only believers **"are the temple of the living God."** That is true both collectively as the Church (Eph 2:21-22), and individually as Christians.

Concerning the latter, the King told the Twelve that after His resurrection, **"you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you"** (John 14:20; cf. 15:4; 17:20-23). This is a remarkable statement, telling us that like the King, we too are an incarnation of God.

The fact that God lives in us is repeated throughout the NT. Accordingly, the Apostle told the Roman Christians, **"the Spirit of Him Who raised Christ from the dead is living in you"** (Rom 8:11). He told the Corinthians, **"you yourselves are God's temple and . . . God's Spirit lives in you"** (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22). He simply told the Galatians, **"Christ lives in me"** (2:20) and he told the Colossians that, **"Christ [is] in you"** (1:27). If *God* lives inside of a person, will they not be enabled to exercise miraculous virtue that humans without God cannot even imagine?

And the temples that God lives in now are not the kind that are designed to hide the presence and glory of God in an inner room, and only to be experienced by a high priest once a year. No, the Apostle says elsewhere:

**God, Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.** (2 Cor 4:6-7)

The Apostle's reference to "**jars of clay**" in which God's "**light**" and "**glory**" "**shine**" undoubtedly refer to "the small earthenware oil-lamps sold . . . in the marketplaces" of Corinth.<sup>8</sup> Such vessels were designed to *let* the light inside shine *outside*, not hide it. And it is precisely because the moral light that shines from us comes from humans that do not naturally demonstrate such an ability, that the King said humanity will readily recognize such light as coming from God (cf. Matt 5:16). We, like the Apostle, confess that, "**we are [not] competent in ourselves,**" (2 Cor 3:4) to possess the moral superiority that is necessary to be "**Christ's ambassadors**" (2 Cor 5:20), "**but our competence comes from God**" (3:4), Who has personally, completely, and permanently come to live inside of us.

The irreversible nature of this moral recreation is rather unforgettably illustrated in the martyrdom of the early Christian leader Bishop Polycarp (c. 156). When a Roman official attempted to scare the Bishop into denouncing his faith by stating, "I have wild beasts; I will throw you to them, unless you change your mind," Polycarp replied, "Call them! Because changing from good to bad is impossible for us."<sup>9</sup>

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***A Devotion to Dad***

*Our Father, we thank You that Your Holy Spirit lives in us. We are truly grateful for all the changes He has made in our lives. We thank You also for the clear, observable proof that the fruits of the Spirit gives us for our belief that we have been irreversibly regenerated for eternal life. As John the Baptist said concerning Christ, "**He must become greater; I must become less.**" (John 3:30), we too pray that the control of the Holy Spirit in us would become greater, and our sin become less. All this for Your glory, and to prove to the world around us that the King really is "**the way, the truth, and the life.**" (John 14:6).*

### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What is the significance of Scriptures such as Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 2:13 in reference to *virtue apologetics*?

- 2) What is the significance of Romans 8:1-9 in reference to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree with our interpretation and application of this passage? Why or why not?
- 3) What is the significance of our claim that only Christians possess the *Holy Spirit*, and all others only have a *sinful* nature, in reference to *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) We claim that only the Christian consistently *can, does, and desires* to fight sin. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) We claim that in many ways, the born again Christian is a different species of human being. Do you agree or disagree?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Donald Bloesch in *The Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity, 2000), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding John 15:5 referring to virtue see section 5.3.B

<sup>3</sup> This verse even more clearly supports our point when it is understood that the context of John 15:1-19 is a contrast between unbelievers and believers, not disobedient believers and obedient believers. "Remaining" in Christ means to be saved. To fail to remain in Christ is to be damned (cf. v. 6). All Christians will bear supernatural, virtuous fruit (cf. v. 15-16).

<sup>4</sup> Most commentators agree on our interpretation here of Roman 8:1-9. For example, Douglas Moo writes concerning verse 9:

So characteristic of these respective "ages" or "realms" are flesh and Spirit that the person belonging to one or the other can be said to be "in" them. In this sense, then, no Christian can be "in the flesh"; and all Christians are, by definition, "in the Spirit." We miss Paul's intention if we think of being "in the flesh" here as the condition of mortality that continues to characterize even believers (Nygren), or as the moral weakness and proneness to sin that, more lamentably, we still possess (Dunn). For the rest of the verse makes absolutely clear that (1) to be a Christian is to be indwelt by God's Spirit; and (2) to be indwelt by God's Spirit means to be "in the Spirit" and not "in the flesh." (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1996], 489).

Likewise, Thomas Schreiner writes regarding the whole passage:

Rom. 8:5-7 constitutes not an exhortation but a description of the mind-set of those of the flesh and those of the Spirit. . . . An exhortation to live according to the Spirit is not present in Rom. 8:5-8. Paul describes the actual mind-set of those who are according to the flesh and Spirit. This is not to deny that believers battle against the flesh (cf. 8:13), but such a struggle should not be read into verses 5-8. . . . The intention of verses 5-11, then, is scarcely to say that believers are partly dominated by the flesh and partly by the Spirit. Instead, Paul argues that those

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who have the Spirit manifest the mind-set of the Spirit. (*Romans* [Baker, 1998], 411-12).

Also, NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910–1990) wrote regarding Romans 8, “To be ‘in the Spirit’ (*en pneumatic*) is the opposite of being ‘in the flesh’ (*en sarki*); and all believers are regarded as being ‘in the Spirit’ (8:9). In practice then, to be ‘in the Spirit’ is to be ‘in Christ’.” (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans TNTC* [Eerdmans, 1985, repr. 1999], 47.)

<sup>5</sup> There is some question as to whether or not an unregenerated person can produce true virtue at all. Regardless of the answer, even some morality among non-Christians does not refute *virtue apologetics* because all that is needed is that Christians practice significantly more virtue, not that their virtue is exclusive. For further discussion see section 5.16.B.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org), II.1.2.

<sup>7</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 94, 107-8.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians (TNTC)* (Eerdmans, 1987), 106.

<sup>9</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 11, online at [ccel.org](http://ccel.org).