

Walking In The Spirit

Workbook 1 – The Basics



25 brief studies plus 33 questions in the workbook section.

Please read all the studies before attempting the workbook questions

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Table of Contents

How to Use This Workbook	3
The New Covenant Part 1	4
The New Covenant Part 2	7
The New Covenant Part 3	9
The New Nature Part 1	11
The New Nature Part 2	13
The Mind Set On the Spirit	16
Connecting Heaven and Earth	19
The Kosmos and the Christian	22
What Is Faith?	25
Walking in Faith Part 1	28
Walking in Faith Part 2	31
God Personally Teaches Us How to Walk By Faith	33
How God Coaches Us	36
Grace, Holiness and God as Our Personal Coach	39
The Highway to Holiness	41
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit Part 1	43
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit Part 2	46
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit Part 3	48
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit Part 4	51
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit Part 5	53
How to Receive Blessings from God By Faith	55
Two Principles	58
Praying for the Positive Blessing	61
What Do You Desire That I Should Do For You?	64
Waiting Upon the Lord	66
Review Questions	69

How To Use This Workbook

This workbook can be used for personal study or in a group setting such as in a church bible class.

It is in black and white, letter-sized format for easy reproduction & distribution.

This manual is designed for anyone who wants to learn about Walking In The Spirit. While the bible teaching is concise and challenging I have tried to avoid using any specialized theological language.

You may readily translate this manual into another language providing that you ask permission by sending me an email at: johned@aibi.ph

PERSONAL STUDY

Read one study per day and you will finish all 25 studies in just under a month. Then go on and do the exercises at the end of the manual. These 33 questions will help reinforce what you have learned.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

Do one or at most two studies per week in your group allowing plenty of time for discussion.

Check out the bible verses that are referenced.

Always ask what people are learning on an individual level from the study e.g. "Mary what was the point that struck you most today?"

Emphasize application to practical daily issues of life.

Each week collect prayer points from group members and close in prayer.

When you have completed the manual go right through all the exercises as a way of tying it all together.

AS A TRAINING COURSE

Send copies of the manual (by post or email) to the students and give them about one month to read the material and do the exercises (see personal study section above). Make yourself available as a mentor during this time.

Then gather all the students together for *at least* three hours, open in worship (30 minutes) and then review the manual and go through the exercise questions together.

Get the students to submit their answers to the exercises to you, then grade them. (There are 33 questions so each answer can be worth 3% with 1% given just for showing up!)

The New Covenant

We live in a secular culture that radically devalues (or trivializes) the inner life and the spiritual life and emphasizes the life of 'sight', of materialism and of that which can be confirmed by the five senses. This series of Eternity-DBS will be a sort of step-by-step guide to renewing our minds and our spiritual senses and opening up to walking and dwelling in the Holy Spirit.

The first thing we need to know is that we are in a New Covenant, we have moved from a lifestyle of 'law-keeping' under the Old Covenant of the laws of Moses, to a lifestyle of "Spirit-following" (while still being holy as He is holy) in the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ. Indeed it is those who are led by the Spirit that are the sons of God! This statement is found in two very similar passages that contrast the flesh life, the Spirit life and the life of serving the law in fear.

Romans 8:12-15 MKJV *Therefore, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (15) For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father!*

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV *I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

The contrast between law and Spirit is forcefully made in Romans, Galatians and Hebrews and is perhaps clearest in this verse:

Romans 7:6 MKJV *But now we having been set free from the Law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*

We are to be a Spirit-following people. But how do we do this? In our modern lives we have become spiritually dull. We are unsure whether it is God, the Devil or our own desires that are leading us. We are lost and confused and have great difficulty following the Holy Spirit so we often revert to Law, or to our own strength and reason or even to despair. But God CAN be trusted and He can and does lead His people. So letskeep on going and look a bit more at this New Covenant.

The New Covenant is **promised** in Jeremiah 31:31

Jeremiah 31:31-34 MKJV *Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, (32) not according to the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Jehovah; (33) but this shall be the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel: After those days, says Jehovah, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (34) And they shall no more teach each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the*

greatest of them, says Jehovah. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.

We can see that is a covenant where the law is written on the hearts of believers and people come to a true internal knowledge of God through persona and individual revelation that needs no external teacher (see also 1 John 2:20,27)

The New Covenant is **instituted** at the Lord's Supper and by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who becomes its Mediator:

Matthew 26:26-28 MKJV *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is My body. (27) And He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink all of it. (28) For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

Hebrews 9:15 MKJV *And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new covenant, so that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, those who are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

The New Covenant **completely replaced** the Old Covenant just as a new will replaces an older will, or a new labor contract replaces an old labor contract:

Hebrews 8:6-13 MKJV *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much He is also the Mediator of a better covenant, which was built upon better promises. (7) For if that first covenant had been without fault, then no place would have been sought for the second. (8) For finding fault with them, He said to them, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, and I will make an end on the house of Israel and on the house of Judah; a new covenant shall be, (9) not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took hold of their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt," because they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not regard them, says the Lord. (10) "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My Laws into their mind and write them in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (11) And they shall not each man teach his neighbor, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. (12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more." (13) In that He says, A new covenant, He has made the first one old. Now that which decays and becomes old is ready to vanish away.*

The New Covenant is **actively ministered** by Paul and the other apostles:

2 Corinthians 3:6 MKJV *who also has made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive.*

The Spirit-led Christian is not under the Jewish Law or any other set of negative legalisms (for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive). We live a life of faith that is inward and spiritual and which is revealed in our conscience and spirit by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. We are under a completely new contract. The old has passed away.

The Old Testament is inspired and valuable and testifies to Christ, but we do not live by the laws and commandments of Moses any longer. We are freed from all of that (see Romans chapter 7, Galatians chapters 2-5)

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 MKJV *(17) And the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (18) But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.*

Romans 8:1-2 MKJV *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (2) But the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

So you are not to live in fleshly passions, nor in religious legalism, but rather in the grace of the New Covenant as followers of Jesus Christ, led by by the Holy Spirit into all truth (John 14:26).

The New Covenant Part 2

The New Covenant calls us to be Spirit-Followers rather than Law-Keepers or Flesh-Indulgers. We saw that the New Covenant was promised by God via Jeremiah the prophet, established by Jesus at the Last Supper and that through His death and resurrection he has become the Mediator of the New Covenant which completely replaces the Old Covenant. We also saw that the New Covenant was actively ministered by the apostles such as Paul.

Now we need to go into a bit more depth about precisely what the New Covenant means for our daily Christian life. We find the Scriptures telling us that the New Covenant is for the 'forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28, Romans 11:27, Hebrews 9:13,14), that it is a better covenant than the Laws of Moses which it replaces (Hebrews 7:22, 8:6) because it is eternal (Hebrews 13:20) and gives not just material blessings but eternal life itself (Hebrews 9:11-15) a new and living way to God (Hebrews 10:20).

The New Covenant is a covenant which brings glory, freedom and life to those who believe (2 Corinthians 3:6-18) and as a result of which we have (in Christ) all the spiritual blessings of the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3) including being seated in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7) and being made children of Abraham (Galatians 3:13-29) which include the Promise of Abraham that we might receive the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14) and it is this Holy Spirit who becomes the dynamic power of the Christian life (Romans 8:4-6, 14:17, 15:13; Galatians 5:16-18).

The New Covenant means we have access to God as sons of God and members of His household (Ephesians 2:17-19, Romans 5:1-5, 8:14-16) since our sin is forgiven and the way to God has been made through Christ's sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 10:20). And this means we can individually go to the throne of grace for grace and help in time of need - and that we do not need any earthly priest to represent us there since Christ is our Mediator (Hebrews 4:14-16). Indeed we can call God our "Abba Father" (Romans 8:14-16).

Now Abba Father means that we have been granted a close personal relationship with God in which He is changing us from glory to glory as we behold the face of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). The Old Covenant was about performance (do this and you shall live) while the new is about grace and the free gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23) and God's ability to renew us with resurrection power (Romans 8:11).

Thus the New Covenant is all about God's absolutely unconditional love for you. You do not have to perform or to do anything in order to be saved. You simply have to trust God. And you do not have to change yourself. God does the changing - working in you to make you an entirely new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15) and creating a 'new man' made in the image of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10).

Thus the knowledge of the New Covenant should put an end to spiritual striving. God loves you and has called you and has given His Son for you so that you can be saved.

Romans 8:31-34 HCSB *What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He did not even spare His own Son, but offered Him up for us all; how will He not also with Him grant us everything? (33) Who can bring an accusation against God's elect?*

God is the One who justifies. (34) Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died, but even more, has been raised; He also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.

Indeed we are told that the New Covenant is a covenant sealed by the very blood of Jesus Christ Himself! (Matthew 26:28, 1 Corinthians 11:25, Hebrews 12:24, 13:20) This is so great a gift that we cannot possibly add to it, replicate it to replace it with anything else. Everything has been done for us, by Him, as the result of a sacrifice that was 'once for all'. (Romans 6:10, Hebrews 7:27, 9:12 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18).

Our task is simply to rejoice in what God has done for us:

Philippians 4:4 MKJV *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice!*

Hebrews 13:15-16 MKJV *By Him, then, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, confessing His name. (16) But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

God provided the New Covenant because the old simply did not work as a method of salvation. God understands our weakness and sinfulness and knows that law-keeping just brings condemnation and death, not because the laws are bad, but because we are incapable of keeping them and so end up under divine judgment.

God wants you to stop struggling. He wants you to entirely trust Him for your salvation.

When you sin you need to remember that you are in a covenant for the forgiveness of sins and come back to God for grace and help and cleansing by His blood (1 John 1:7-10).

When you are in need of blessing you need to remember that the New Covenant has given you all the blessings of Abraham and indeed all the blessings in the heavenly realms! (Galatians 3;13-19, Ephesians 1:3)

When you are in need of grace and help you need to remember that the New Covenant has given you glorious access to your Abba Father, an understanding High Priest and Mediator, and the privilege of being able to come before the Throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:14-16)

The New Covenant is God's supply agreement with you. In it all the promises of God are 'yea and amen' and it is these precious promises of the covenant that give us all we require for life and godliness. (2 Corinthians 1:20, 7:1; 2 Peter 1:4)

The Precious Promises

2 Peter 1:2-4 MKJV *Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, (3) according as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue, (4) through which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, so that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

2 Corinthians 1:20 ISV *For all God's promises are "Yes" in him. And so through him we can say "Amen," to the glory of God.*

Every covenant agreement, even in the human realm, has certain good promises attached. Now the glorious New Covenant has all the promises of God attached - and they are 'yea and amen' in Christ Jesus! These promises are free gifts. They are not earned. They are like the gifts you get as an inheritance from your uncle. You did not earn them – they were freely given because he chose to give them to you!

You do not have to 'do something' (other than believe in Jesus) for these promises to be activated. They are the promises of faith, and not of works. And they are simply inherited through faith and patience like that of Abraham (Hebrews 6:11-15).

The purpose of the promises is 'so that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature'. That is that we might become a truly holy and godly and kind and compassionate people made in the image of the God who is Love.

The promises are not given for the flesh but for the spirit. For the flesh profits nothing:

John 6:63 MKJV *It is the Spirit that makes alive, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life.*

The promises of God are faith-activated spiritual principles that help us to be Spirit-led Jesus-followers who 'escape the corruption that is in the world through lust'. So the promises of God are world-renouncing and lust-denying. They are the glorious promises of the saints that give hope in the midst of trials and bring the grace and peace of God to bear in the midst of life.

Let's look at 2 Peter 1:2-4 above. God's divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. These gifts are received through the knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we can obtain glory and virtue. Whatever you require to live a positive, godly Christian life will be supplied through Christ and through the promises of His covenant.

Experience seems to contradict this. In the current recession many ministries are hurting and some are closing. The mail is full of urgent appeals for funds. Many Christians seem to be saying that they do not have all that they need for life and godliness.

On the other hand I have lived by faith for over 25 years and I have had many 'lean times' but there has always been enough for life and godliness. God has seasons of abundance and of pruning, of directing funds, then of redirecting them. Occasionally the expensive programs have had their time and need to go. And from time to time God brings us back to holy simplicity.

It is in faith's holy simplicity that we find the activation of the precious promises of God. It is as we follow Abraham and Joshua that we find the victory.

The New Covenant is full of gifts for those who follow Christ. Gifts such as eternal life, godliness, and the promised Holy Spirit. We press into the experience of those gifts through faith.

For instance we can believe God for more and more joy in the Holy Ghost or we can be unbelieving and self-pitying. We can go to the Bible looking for things to rejoice in or we can look at our circumstances and find things to be miserable about. We can rejoice in hope or we can say "I will believe it when I see it".

One of the most fundamental promises that we inherit is that of the love of God being poured out in our lives (Romans 5:5). Because of what Jesus has done on the cross we are 'justified' – that is made good, OK and blameless, in the sight of God. Many Christians do not yet believe that God truly loves them in this way. They are still struggling to 'be good' so that God can love them. In fact it the other way around. God loves us first – and later on as we understand this, we find it easy to do good works.

Meditate on bible verses about the love of God such as the following:

1 John 4:16 MKJV *And we have known and believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

Romans 8:37-39 MKJV *But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Galatians 2:20 MKJV *I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf.*

1 John 4:9-10 MKJV *In this the love of God was revealed in us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation concerning our sins.*

Pray that God will awaken your spirit to the love of God, opening your 'faith senses', that is your spiritual eyes and spiritual ears, to the goodness and wonder and kindness of the Savior. Press in to inherit these things. Stir up your faith to lay hold of the promises that are yours as part of the eternal covenant.

The New Nature

One of the keys to walking in the Spirit is to realize that you now have a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17) that gives you the power to carry out Christ's commandments.

This new nature is created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24) and is in the image of God (Colossians 3:10). Indeed it is Christ in you - the hope of glory! (Colossians 1:27). Now we will look a bit further at these four verses:

2 Corinthians 5:17 MKJV *(17) So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

Ephesians 4:24 MKJV *And you should put on the new man, who according to God was created in righteousness and true holiness.*

Colossians 3:9-14 MKJV *Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his deeds (10) and having put on the new, having been renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, (11) where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman, but Christ is all things in all. (12) Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender feelings of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, (13) forbearing one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any. As Christ forgave you, so also you do. (14) And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.*

Colossians 1:27 HCSB *God wanted to make known to those among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Walking in the Spirit is, for all intents and purposes, exactly the same as living out from your new nature, the new creation that you are. You have a new self that is created in righteousness and truth and when you tap into this and 'put it on' you live in righteousness and truth. The new nature is the nature of Christ and cannot sin, nor is it able to do so because it is born of God and not of the flesh (1 John 3:9 which we will look at more tomorrow).

You are a new eternal person, trapped in an old body (which will pass away), and in conflict with its lusts – the lusts of the flesh. The idea is to tap into the new eternal righteous person and to put off the old lustful wicked nature completely.

So we see in Colossians 3:9-14 that Paul tells us to put off our 'old man' with its wicked deeds (which includes lying in this case) and to put on the new man. We are to substitute the new life for the old life. The new life replaces the old life completely. Just as when I put off my gardening clothes and put on my normal clothes. I don't go out the door wearing gardening gloves and old jeans with paint on them! I have taken them off completely and put on a complete set of new clothes. So we are to take off the old man completely and to put on the new man in its place. Old things have passed away, behold all things are new!

Colossians also tells us that this new nature is the nature of God's chosen elect – it is holy, beloved, meek and gentle:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender feelings of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, (13) forbearing one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any. As Christ forgave you, so also you do. (14) And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.

The new nature is from Heaven so it is peaceful, wise and good (James 3;17,18) and is full of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). Thus the new nature is a big change for most of us – for instance being 'long-suffering' is not natural to the old nature at all! The new life we have in Christ is so different to the old life that there is no possibility whatsoever of just 'educating the old nature' into Christ-likeness. In fact the old nature needs to be crucified and 'killed off' (Galatians 5:24)

The only chance we have of truly living the Christian life is to let Christ in us live it for us. Thus it is a conscious decision to chose Christ over the flesh, day after day. We have to make a faith decision to walk in the Spirit. We have to choose to follow our righteous new nature. And this can be a struggle:

Galatians 5:16-25 HCSB *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (17) For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, (21) envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar, about which I tell you in advance--as I told you before--that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit.*

Now you do not have to construct the new nature, it is already there, it is Christ in you the hope of glory. It is not a matter of studying up on all the virtues and figuring out how to do them one by one. The virtues and righteousness of God are already there. They are in you. They come with the package known as eternal life. You just need to allow them to be expressed. You just have to choose them, to put them on. Like clothes that are already in a drawer you just have to reach in and choose to wear them.

Your part is simply to follow the Holy Spirit by faith. You do this by choosing the Spirit over the flesh again and again. You spend time in prayer, worship, bible study and in good works that God has called you to do. You make no provision for the flesh. You ignore evil. You flee temptation. You meet with the brethren and you watch and pray so that you will not give in to your old nature. As you do these things the new man is 'put on' and the old man is 'put off'.

It is not complicated, you simply say "Yes" to God and "No" to your flesh. As you do that the spiritual life will naturally come forth out of you. The new nature, which is God's eternal life within you, will be manifested. The glory of God will come forth as you walk in the Spirit by faith.

2 Corinthians 3:18 HCSB *(18) We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

The New Nature 2

One of the keys to walking in the Spirit is to understand the glory of the new, born-again nature that you have been given in Christ. The new nature is Christ in you, a perfect, righteous and holy nature in the image of God that is incapable of sin:

1 John 3:9 HCSB *Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.*

John 3:3-8 MKJV *Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (4) Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? (5) Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again. (8) The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice, but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

The old nature, the old man, the flesh – these are capable of sin – but your new nature does not sin. Your new nature is God's nature – it is God's seed within you. Since God does not sin nor does He desire to sin – so your new nature does not desire to sin either.

So then why do Christians sin? Because of the flesh. The flesh is the temporary home where sin dwells and it is in rebellion against God. The old nature part of you wants to serve the flesh and the new nature part of you wants to serve God.

We find that there are two births – a natural birth that is 'in Adam' and a spiritual birth that is 'in Christ'. The bible contrasts those 'born of woman' with those in the Kingdom of God (Luke 7:28, Matthew 11:11-13) and those born of the flesh with those born of the Spirit (John 1:13, 3:6).

Part of you was 'born of the flesh'. This was your first birth and results in the old fallible nature that results in death. You do not have to teach a child how to lie or how to be jealous of its brother or how to hit another child. The child naturally has rage, anger, jealousy and strife built in as part of the old Adamic nature. The flesh is bad from birth. And the flesh nature, in its purest form, wants every impulse gratified right now. The old nature is very persistent and cunning. Some people naively think it can be educated into holiness. However it can only be crucified.

Another part of you (if you are a Christian) is born-again' by the living Word of God. When this happened you were given eternal life and a new eternal nature was created within you. This new eternal nature is 'born of God' and is the true you. This is being born of the Spirit.

The person you see in the mirror is NOT the true eternal you. The person in the mirror is a mixture of your temporary passing-away self (centered around your body) and your true eternal self (centered around your spirit).

You can think of it this way - if a Christian dies then he or she immediately sheds the body, and goes to be with Jesus and loses any further desire or capacity for sin. You lose the sin nature when you die. It is not a permanent part of you. Sin is a temporary intrusion on the real life of

the Christian. If you are truly born-again you love righteousness, hate wickedness and feel anguished by any sin that you commit.

(On the other hand if you do not love righteousness and hate wickedness or feel discomfort when you sin then you have not repented of sin and are not born-again.)

Paul says some very remarkable things in Romans chapter 7:

Romans 7:15-17 MKJV *For that which I do, I know not. For what I desire, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do. (16) If then I do that which I do not desire, I consent to the law that it is good. (17) **But now it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.***

Romans 7:20 MKJV *But if I do what I do not desire, it is no more I working it out, but sin dwelling in me.*

Paul says that 'it is no more I who do it but sin that dwells in me'. What does he mean by this? Paul's true self, his eternal self serves God, loves the law and agrees with everything that is holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:14-25). On the other hand he gets caught up in all kinds of lust and covetousness (Romans 7:5-10). Paul separates himself from his sin. Paul agrees that he sins but that the sin is being committed by something other than Paul. The sin is being committed not by 'eternal Paul' but by 'sin that dwells in me'.

Now if I am speeding on the freeway and I get pulled over and I try to tell the police officer that 'it was not me sinning but sin that dwells within me' then I think she would just double the ticket! But amazing as it may seem this is the literal spiritual truth.

When you sin, it is not the 'true you' who sins, but rather it is sin dwelling in you – that is in your flesh.

Romans 7:17-25 MKJV *But now it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find... For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man; (23) but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin being in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

So Paul finds himself serving the law of God with his mind and the law of sin with his flesh – but the word 'myself' only appears on one side of the equation: "I myself serve the Law of God". The true new nature of the Christian, the person you will be forever in heaven, the person you most truly want to be in God, that person serves the Law of God.

The new nature does not have to become sinless, it is sinless. It is Christ in you the hope of glory. It is born of the Spirit. It is born of the Word of God. It is born of God. It cannot sin. Nor does it ever even desire to sin, no not the least little bit. Your new nature loves the law of God, the righteousness of God and everything about God.

When you sin it is not your new nature that is in control. You sin because you give in to the flesh or to the old nature. You sin because you do not crucify the old man. You sin because you do

not walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, when put in control, simply will not let you sin. He will squelch the flesh and stop the impulses from fully reaching fruition.

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV *I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

The Bible asks us to 'walk worthy' of our new nature. We have a higher calling and are to set our minds on higher things (Philippians 4:8) and on the Spirit (Romans 8:4-6). As we set our mind on the Spirit we reap life and peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3 MKJV *I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, (2) with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

The Mind Set On The Spirit

Romans 8:4-10 ISV *so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (5) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. (6) To set our minds on the flesh leads to death, but to set our minds on the Spirit leads to life and peace. (7) That is why the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile toward God. For it refuses to submit to the authority of God's law because it is powerless to do so. (8) Indeed, those who are under the control of the flesh cannot please God. (9) You, however, are not of the flesh but under the control of the Spirit, since God's Spirit lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. (10) But if Christ is in you, your bodies are dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

In the last couple of studies we saw that the born-again Christian has a glorious new nature, which is born of God and which is sinless.

We also saw that this new nature struggles against the old nature and in particular against the flesh. The Christian is caught up in a spiritual tug-of-war as the Spirit and the flesh battle it out (Romans 7). In Galatians 5:16-18, we are also promised that if we walk in the Spirit we shall in no way carry out the desires of the flesh. So how do we do that? The answer lies in today's verses – Romans 8:4-10 above:

Verse 4 – tells us that we will completely fulfill all the righteous requirements of God's law if we live (walk) according to the Spirit. All that is required for holiness is for us to follow God's Holy Spirit every day. That will be sufficient. We will then have our new nature activated and empowered and be able to live lives that are holy and righteous and good.

Verse 5 – points out that there are two kinds of people, the carnal who set their minds on things of the flesh and the spiritual who set their minds on spiritual things. What you habitually think about determines what kind of person you are. If you habitually think of fleshly things, that indicates you are a fleshly person. On the other hand if you habitually think of spiritual things, that indicates that you are a spiritual person.

Verse 6 – contrasts the consequences of these two ways of thinking. The mind set on the flesh leads to death. The mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace. Obviously if you want life and peace you must set your mind on things of the Spirit. Your mind should be filled with compassion and humility and love and kindness and set on things above to the glory of God. You must have the humble, lowly servant-like mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 11:28-30).

The mind is like a electrical switch that can be set on various channels and which receives power from Heaven or from Hell. When the mind is set on the Spirit we receive power from Heaven. When the mind is set on the flesh we are ruled by devilish impulses and dark wisdom.

James 3:13-18 ISV *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good life that his works are done in humility born of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and lying against the truth. (15) That kind of wisdom does not come from above. No, it is worldly, self-centered, and demonic. (16) For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. (17) However, the wisdom that comes*

from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of compassion and good fruits, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is grown from the seed of peace planted by peacemakers.

If we set our minds on the flesh we will reap death, darkness and chaos. On the other hand if we set our mind on the Spirit we will reap wisdom, life and peace. The choice is yours and you must make it anew each day.

Philippians 4:8 ISV *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is fair, whatever is pure, whatever is acceptable, whatever is commendable, if there is anything of excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy-keep thinking about these things.*

Colossians 3:1-4 ISV *Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep focusing on the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. (3) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ your life is revealed, then you, too, will be revealed with him in glory.*

In order to do this I recommend that you have a daily time of prayer and bible reading and that you participate in as many godly activities as possible and abstain from all carnal and worldly activities and that you flee from that which wars against the soul (pornography, certain violent or trashy TV programs, gossip magazines, etc).

Paul drives the point home in verse 7 by telling us that the flesh is powerless. It cannot fulfill God's requirements because it lacks the correct nature. A warthog wallows in the mud because that is its nature. It is not going to lick itself clean like a cat does because it does not have the nature of a cat. The flesh has the fallen nature. It is natural for the flesh to sin. That is what it does. It refuses to submit to God's law. It always wants its own way and its own desires.

Verse 8 goes on to say that those who are 'in the flesh' – that is those who are under the control of the flesh, cannot please God. It is as simple and as black and white as that. You cannot educate the flesh into compliance with God's righteousness. The flesh will always desire sin and even when the flesh takes a religious turn it will be powerless to do any good (2 Timothy 3:5).

In complete contrast Verse 9 says that all true born-again Christians are 'in the Spirit', and are not in the flesh. We have the Spirit as part of the promises of the New Covenant. He is the promised Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:14) and verse 9 tells us that God's Spirit lives in us and is the Spirit of Christ. Indeed we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 9:16) and Christ dwells in us (Romans 8:10). Now, in a sort of paradox, even though we are in the Spirit we still need to set our minds on the things of the Spirit! In the last part of verse 9, Paul turns this into a test of true Christian faith. If a person cannot set their mind on spiritual things, if there is nothing of the Holy Ghost about them, then they are carnal and not of Christ.

Lastly verse 10 informs us that Christ dwells in the believer and that this divine indwelling is a powerful life-giving Presence. Even though our bodies are dead because of sin, and even though our flesh nature leads to death for the body; yet our new nature is alive because of the imparted, imputed and indwelling righteousness of Christ.

Paul pulls no punches. You have two choices and only two choices. Either you set your mind on the flesh and destroy yourself, or you set your mind on the Spirit and reap life and peace. You

cannot play it both ways. Defeated Christians keep setting their minds on the garbage in their lives instead of on God. You cannot keep anything fleshly or carnal in your life. You cannot keep visiting that dubious website or holding onto that grudge or flirting with married people or loving money or being stingy and hard-hearted. You cannot be carnal, competitive, ruthless and selfishly ambitious. Those days are over if you are in Christ.

Every Christian has to make a conscious decision about their mental habits and their lifestyle. Will they focus on faith or upon doubt? On God or on self? On lusts or upon God's promises? We have to pray in the Spirit and fight the good fight of faith. This is not easy but it is worth it.

One tip - do not fight your evil thoughts. Simply dismiss them and refocus on God - and let the Holy Spirit take care of them. For instance if your mind is filled with lust make the decision to find something else to think about. Go put on some Christian music and start worshiping. Once you start worshiping the evil thoughts will subside.

Connecting Heaven & Earth

Have you ever thought about the connection between the Heavenly realms above and your life here on Earth? Have you ever thought that there must be 'something more' than the futile struggle that is 'life without God and without thought of Heaven? Have you thought that your life might be part of some heavenly plan and that heaven might have purposes to work in you and through you?

Genesis 1:1 MKJV *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Right at the beginning of the Bible we find God creating the heavens and the earth and all that is in them and afterwards He calls His Creation good – both the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:31). God walks in the garden with Adam. There are wonderful trees with spiritual properties. People live over 900 years. Heaven and earth are connected until the Fall, until the expulsion from Eden the meeting place of man and God.

Matthew 6:10 MKJV *Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.*

The Lord's Prayer asks us to pray for a restoration of the broken connection between Heaven and Earth. This restored connection is known as the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is simply God turning up as King, and often in some manifestation of power. Jesus' disciples were to pray for God to rule here on earth. And not just God's rule here and there, but for complete obedience to be manifested here on earth as it is in Heaven.

Now God is involving us!! He asks us to pray. And He is going to change the world through those prayers. Our prayers - your prayers and my prayers are part of the key to the wonder of a thousand miracles breaking out on earth as the shackles of Satan are broken and earth is set free to worship its true Father and Creator and King!

The next three verses go into more detail about what the disciples were to do in answer to the Lord's Prayer:

Matthew 16:19 MKJV *And I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to you. And whatever you may bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever you may loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Matthew 18:18-20 MKJV *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven. (19) Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

Matthew 28:18-20 MKJV *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. (19) Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen.*

Jesus bestows some kind of Kingdom authority that involves both Heaven and earth. It is released by Christians in unity 'where two or three are gathered in My Name' and is a delegation of the authority that has been given to Him by the Father after the resurrection. We bind, loose, teach, disciple, baptize and instruct - with obedience to the commandments of Heaven always being in view.

In the process we struggle against the spiritual powers and principalities in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10, 1 John 5:18, Luke 4:6, Ephesians 2:1-4)) tearing down strongholds and vain imaginations and everything that exalts itself against God (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

In the end the saints shall be victorious over this demonic opposition in the (lower) heavenly realms:

Revelation 12:10-12 MKJV *(10) And I heard a great voice saying in Heaven, Now has come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. (11) And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they did not love their soul until death.*

(12) Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and those tabernacling in them.

But after the heavenly victory the Devil is cast to earth and the Tribulation and the path to Armageddon gets underway:

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and in the sea! For the Devil came down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a little time.

Then after all the End Times events are complete there is a renewal of both heaven and earth, a new heavens and a new earth:

2 Peter 3:13 MKJV *But according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

At this point the Heaven and earth problem will be finally solved and 'the dwelling place of God will be with men'.

Revelation 21:1-3 MKJV *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer is. (2) And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband. (3) And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.*

That is our hope. Our hope is that the Great Glory will finally break through and be complete. And it will - for those words are faithful and true.

Our task as Christians is to realize that we are to connect heaven and earth. Just as Christ on the cross connected heaven and earth so we are to join Him there on the cross. Indeed we are temples of the Holy Spirit. We are where God dwells. We are the sacred spots that connect Heaven and earth. And if the Kingdom of God is to be established it must be established in us.

Now pray with me:

Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Christian and the Kosmos

Kosmos is the Greek word for 'world' and in New Testament times it had various meanings including humanity in general e.g. John 3:16 "God so loved the world" or the realm in which political and spiritual events play out - "this gospel of the Kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world". But today we will be looking at the 'theological' meaning as used by Paul, Jesus and the apostles. In that sense kosmos meant the world as dominated by evil and especially by the astrological, demonic and idolatrous powers of the day and their human counterparts such as emperors who declared themselves to be gods.

This kosmos holds the whole world in its spiritual grip (1 John 5:19) through an ordered hierarchy of demonic beings:

Ephesians 6:12 MKJV *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Satan, the prince of this world (John 12:21) is also the prince of the power of the air and causes human beings caught up in the world to disobey God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 MKJV *And He has made you alive, who were once dead in trespasses and sins, (2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience; (3) among whom we also had our way of life in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

Now Satan offers the kosmos to those who will serve him and bow down and worship him.

Luke 4:5-8 MKJV *And the Devil, leading Him up into a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. (6) And the Devil said to Him, All this power I will give you, and the glory of them; for it has been delivered to me. And I give it to whomever I will. (7) Therefore if you will worship me, all shall be yours. (8) And Jesus answered and said to him, Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."*

However Satan is defeated by Christ:

John 12:31 MKJV *Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

So we see that the kosmos is in spiritual darkness - but the Christian is in the light:

John 14:17 MKJV *the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you.*

Colossians 1:12-13 MKJV *(12) giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. (13) For He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son;*

So great is this light-dark contrast that the Christian must live separately from the Satanic kosmos and all its allurements. This separation from the kosmos will involve sacrifice because so much of this age is controlled by these evil powers. Indeed separating ourselves from them is akin to crucifixion:

John 12:24-25 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. (25) He who loves his life shall lose it. And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.*

Matthew 16:24-26 MKJV *Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (25) For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whoever desires to lose his life for My sake shall find it. (26) For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

God rewards our separateness by promising that He will be our Father and so He calls us out of the wrong alliances and distractions of the kosmos and into intimacy with Himself:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 MKJV *(14) Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship does righteousness have with lawlessness? And what partnership does light have with darkness? (15) And what agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever? (16) And what agreement does a temple of God have with idols? For you are the temple of the living God, as God has said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (17) Therefore come out from among them and be separated, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean thing. And I will receive you (18) and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.*

It is God's desire for intimacy with His blood-bought people that makes worldliness such a terrible sin:

James 4:4 MKJV *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever desires to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

Indeed the kosmos is not just against God – it is against you and against me. The kosmos is determined to destroy your spiritual life or at least to render it totally unfruitful.

Matthew 13:22 MKJV *And that sown into the thorns is this: he who hears the Word; and the anxiety of this world, and the deceit of riches, choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful.*

We are not to 'sell our souls' to the world, the corporation, the stock market, or to anything at all! Instead we are to be content with what we have (1 Timothy 6:6-8) and to make it our aim to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence (1 Timothy 2:2).

We are to aim at godly simplicity. The sweaty anxiety of the worldling is to be far from the Christian who walks in the Spirit. We are to commit our whole life to God's Providence. We are to take up our cross and leave the world far behind.

Hebrews 13:12-14 MKJV *Therefore Jesus also, so that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. (13) Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. (14) For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*

What Is Faith?

In the last couple of studies we have talked about the spiritual realities that surround us. And about how God's plan is to reconnect earth and heaven so His will is done on earth as it is in Heaven and how that plan is opposed by the 'kosmos' - the present world rulers of darkness from which the Christian must be separate.

Now the key act in connecting heaven and earth is living faith. Faith is the creature reconnecting with the Creator. Faith is believing in the goodness of the One who made us and is His power and in His capacity to act on our behalf, even in the midst of this fallen world.

Faith is the intuitive spiritual apprehension of God, His nature, His power and His works. Faith understands that there is an invisible realm behind all things, that God rules over it as a real and actual Creator and that this God is not an impersonal force of fate but rather a God who loves and rewards those who seek after Him.

Hebrews 11:1-6 HCSB *Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. (2) For by it our ancestors were approved. (3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible. (4) By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By this he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through this. (5) By faith, Enoch was taken away so that he did not experience death, and he was not to be found because God took him away. For prior to his transformation he was approved, having pleased God. (6) Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.*

The ancients did not have the religious structures we have today, or even the Bible we have today, but they believed God. They connected with Him and followed Him and gained His approval through their faith. By their faith they glimpsed the heavenly realms and by their faith they became people who did God's will on earth as it is done in Heaven.

The ancients had this deep intuitive spiritual apprehension of God, His nature, His power and His works that I spoke of earlier.

Faith is not just about Scripture memory, external righteousness or obedience to rules – the Pharisees had that but they did not believe when Jesus came. Nor is it about right ceremony – the high priests and the Sadducees had that yet they failed to understand the Scriptures or the power of God (Matthew 22:29). Nor is it about having a deep knowledge of doctrine. Nicodemus was a teacher of all Israel yet Jesus told Nicodemus that he still needed to be born-again.

Faith is what the Samaritan woman at the well had (John chapter 4) when she simply believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Her life was a moral mess, her doctrine at that point was mainly wrong (Jesus told her 'you do not know what you worship') , and she had probably never been to the Jewish temple. But she believed in Jesus and was saved. As Jesus gently revealed her past the Samaritan woman simply knew that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah. Again we find faith existing as an intuitive spiritual apprehension of God, His nature, His power and His works.

When people have faith they latch onto God and they connect or reconnect with Heaven. As a result of moving into alignment with God and with Heaven they move out of alignment with the earthly, demonic powers of the kosmos mentioned yesterday. Two passages from Hebrews 11 illustrate this principle:

Hebrews 11:7-10 HCSB *By faith Noah, after being warned about what was not yet seen, in reverence built an ark to deliver his family. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (8) By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Hebrews 11:23-27 HCSB *By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. (24) By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (25) and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin. (26) For he considered reproach for the sake of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for he persevered, as one who sees Him who is invisible.*

Faith is not a creed, it is a dynamic spiritual principle of personal relationship to our Abba Father God who loves us! Faith looks beyond this world and into the next:

2 Corinthians 5:7 HCSB *for we walk by faith, not by sight--*

2 Corinthians 4:18 HCSB *So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

As we exercise the spiritual intuition of faith and believe in God and in His promises then unusual things start to happen. Creeds do not produce miracles - but true faith does.

Hebrews 11:32-34 HCSB *And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, (33) who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength after being weak, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight.*

Indeed Jesus constantly encouraged His disciples to have this kind of world-transforming faith:

Mark 11:21-24 HCSB *Then Peter remembered and said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that You cursed is withered." (22) Jesus replied to them, "Have faith in God. (23) I assure you: If anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. (24) Therefore, I tell you, all the things you pray and ask for--believe that you have received them, and you will have them.*

Now, going back to the start, the purpose of such world-transforming faith is for God's Kingdom to come and for God's will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Within that framework, within the Grand Cause of a world infused with God's glory, you can move mountains by faith alone. Because when you believe then God's character, power and goodness is brought into the picture. If you do not believe all you are left with is human strength and the powers of darkness.

Walking By Faith

How can we live a vital Christian life like that of Abraham, the prophets and the apostles? The people who have vital Christian lives are people who trust in God and who walk by faith:

Romans 4:12 HCSB *And he became the father of the circumcised, not only to those who are circumcised, but also to those who follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.*

2 Corinthians 5:7 MKJV *for we walk by faith, not by sight;*

Romans 1:16-17 MKJV *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

We walk by faith, and this leads us to be in the Spirit and to being led by the Spirit.

Now how did Abraham walk by faith long before there were churches, bibles, and modern worship services - even long before the law of Moses? Abraham believed that what God said would actually come to pass. Faith is trusting that God will keep His promises. In Abraham's case it was believing the promise that he would become the father of many nations:

Romans 4:16-21 MKJV *Therefore it is of faith so that it might be according to grace; for the promise to be made sure to all the seed, not only to that which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (17) (as it has been written, "I have made you a father of many nations") --before God, whom he believed, who makes the dead live, and calls the things which do not exist as though they do exist. (18) For he who beyond hope believed on hope for him to become the father of many nations (according to that which was spoken, "So your seed shall be"). (19) And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead (being about a hundred years old) or the deadening of Sarah's womb. (20) He did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was also able to perform.*

So we see Abraham believing in a God who makes the dead to live and calls the things which do not exist as though they do exist. In hope against hope Abraham believed without any doubt or wavering. Abraham held on to that promise of God for for 25 years. Abraham was strong in faith, and gave glory to God, convinced that what God had promised He was able to perform.

Abraham did not set his hope in a creed or a philosophy or a set of notions and ideas. Instead Abraham believed in a real and tangible outcome from a real and knowable God. Christianity is not a philosophy or a systematic set of human ideas about God. Rather it is faith in a God who really, actually will turn up in the midst of your life:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 MKJV *(4) And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

Faith is believing that what God said will occur

Doubt is being unsure that what God said will occur

Unbelief is being firmly convinced that what God said will not come to pass

Presumption is thinking God said something would occur when He did not say so

Rebellion is deliberately going against the word of God so as to disobey it

For instance faith is believing that God is righteous and good and will work justice even when everything seems crooked and unjust. Faith is deciding not to take revenge because you can trust God to work things out rightly in the end.

Saving faith is believing that Jesus has died on your behalf and has purchased your salvation. It is letting go of your own spiritual efforts to climb some kind of spiritual ladder into Heaven! Saving faith involves letting Christ take charge of your life and works - and letting Jesus do that within you which you cannot do yourself.

Walking by faith is directing your life in the sure knowledge of the character and purposes of God. It also involves having real tangible expectations, based on God's promises, that affect your major life decisions.

Genesis 12:1-4 ESV *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. (2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (4) So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

For instance when you are considering a major change in your life do you just consult your own reasoning or do you wait upon the Lord?

Proverbs 3:5-7 ESV *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (7) Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.*

People who walk by faith are distinctly different. They believe that they will inherit a real heavenly reward that will make any earthly affliction seem temporary and passing.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 HCSB *(16) Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. (17) For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. (18) So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

This kind of courage comes from having real trust that God will perform what He has promised. It is believing the unseen is more real than the seen. It is believing your inner knowledge of God rather than the outer knowledge of the senses:

Matthew 14:28-32 HCSB *"Lord, if it's You," Peter answered Him, "command me to come to You on the water." (29) "Come!" He said. And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. (30) But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (32) When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

Walking by faith is like Peter's walking on the water – and it takes a lot of practice! More on this in the next study.

Walking By Faith 2

Yesterday we caught a glimpse of what it means to walk by faith and I ended up by saying that it took a lot of practice and that, at first, we can expect walking by faith to be a bit like Peter's attempt at walking on water – bold stepping out followed by a bit of a splash!

Walking by faith involves supernatural knowledge known as revelation. Now revelation is just God's information revealed to your spirit. It is information that the human mind cannot find out by itself. One bible teacher has called them 'downloads from Heaven'. It can be as simple as "cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will have a catch of fish" or as complex as Paul's revelation concerning the nature of the Church. In 1 Corinthians Paul tells us a bit about this process:

1 Corinthians 2:7-10 MKJV *(7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God has hidden, predetermining it before the world for our glory; (8) which none of the rulers of this world knew (for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory). (9) But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (10) But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

The smartest and most powerful people of the day could not figure out the truth about Jesus but those who listened to the Holy Spirit could. The Holy Spirit bypassed the natural senses (what eye has not seen, nor ear heard) and even the inner life of the natural man (nor has entered into the heart of man) to reveal His blessings to believers (*...the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.* "But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit).

So we see that the person who is walking by faith gets 'downloads from Heaven' and that these downloads from Heaven reveal Christ, His blessings, and all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

Romans 8 tells us that the Christian is to be in spiritual contact with God, through the Holy Spirit so that he or she can say "Indeed I am led by the Holy Spirit".

Romans 8:14 MKJV *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Now as I said earlier this is a process that we practice. Each day we need to spend time alone with God and we need to slow down now and then and 'put up our spiritual antenna' to hear exactly what God is saying.

We are to stop rushing, fretting and over-calculating life (though we are still to use our God-given brains). Rather we are to put our noisy selves to one side, and be quiet and be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

John's gospel reveals Jesus' humble dependent relationship with the Father in some detail:

John 5:19-20 MKJV *Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do. For whatever things He does, these also the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all the things that He Himself does. And He will show Him greater works than these, so that you may marvel.*

John 5:30 MKJV *I can do nothing of My own self. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me.*

John 8:28-29 MKJV *Then Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things. (29) And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things which please Him.*

Jesus says that He can do 'nothing of Himself' and He says that three times, which in Scripture is frequently a way of emphasizing something. Jesus tell us that he only does what He sees His Father doing (John 5:19-20), then what He hears from His Father (John 5:30), then that He only speaks what His Father has taught Him (John 8:28-29).

By doing 'nothing of Himself' He means nothing out of His own personal will or initiative. Jesus always waited for the 'download from Heaven' before proceeding with His ministry. He was completely Spirit-led and instructed from above.

We are to be a God-instructed people with His laws written upon our hearts and minds:

John 6:45 MKJV *It is written in the Prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Me.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9 MKJV *But regarding brotherly love, you do not need that I write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.*

1 John 2:20 MKJV *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.*

1 John 2:27 MKJV *But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him.*

More on how God teaches us to know Christ, love others and carry out good works in the next study!

God Personally Teaches Us How To Walk By Faith

Toward the end of the last study we saw that God is involved in teaching His saints how to live the Christian life. This teaching is an inner work of the Holy Spirit:

1 John 2:27 MKJV *But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him.*

This teaching ministry of the Holy Ghost lies outside of the 'merely human' realm:

Matthew 16:15-17 MKJV *He said to them, But who do you say I am? (16) And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. (17) Jesus answered and said to him, You are blessed, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father in Heaven.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9 MKJV *But regarding brotherly love, you do not need that I write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.*

Jesus briefly describes this process of heavenly revelation in Matthew chapter 11

Matthew 11:25-27 MKJV *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the sophisticated and cunning, and revealed them to babes. (26) Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. (27) All things are delivered to Me by My Father. And no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son will reveal Him.*

Jesus tells us that God has structured spiritual knowledge so that certain truths are 'hidden' from natural human reasoning (the sophisticated and the cunning) and yet are revealed to the open, innocent mind ('babe') that truly seeks after God.

Jesus also claims to be the gatekeeper of all spiritual knowledge: *Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son will reveal Him.*

We cannot 'figure God out' as a result of our own independent thinking (indeed that is often how cults start). Rather we are dependent on Jesus Christ to reveal the Father to us. This infuriates those who think they understand - but who are blind to real spiritual truth:

Matthew 15:12-14 MKJV *Then His disciples came and said to Him, Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying? (13) But He answered and said, Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. (14) Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

Many of the religious experts of Christ's day – the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and chief priests, missed the point. They did not follow Christ. Instead they just defended their own knowledge and their own religious system.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 MKJV (7) *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God has hidden, predetermining it before the world for our glory; (8) which none of the rulers of this world knew (for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory).*

God's teaching ministry involves the Holy Spirit and may even bypass the senses and the intellect:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 MKJV (9) *But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (10) But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

Continuing in 1 Corinthians we find that this process involves communication directly from God's Spirit to us:

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 MKJV (11) *For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God.*

The Spirit of God educates us so that we 'might know the things that are freely given to us by God'. So we see that the Holy Spirit shows us our blessedness! The Holy Spirit is within us to tell us all the wonderful things that God has done for us!

Ephesians 1:3 MKJV *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ;*

This internal teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is integral to being a true New Covenant Christian, a follower of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit:

Hebrews 8:10-12 HCSB ... *"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. (11) And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (12) For I will be merciful to their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins."*

In stark contrast the Pharisees knew their Scriptures but they did not personally listen to God. Jesus states this very powerfully in John chapter 8:

John 8:42-47 MKJV *Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love Me, for I went forth and came from God; for I did not come of Myself, but He sent Me. (43) Why do you not know My speech? Because you cannot hear My Word. (44) You are of the Devil as father, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not abide in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. (45) And because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me. (46)*

Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe Me? (47) He who is of God hears God's Words. Therefore you do not hear them because you are not of God.

Jesus finishes this paragraph with “He who is of God hears God's Words. Therefore you do not hear them because you are not of God”. In verse 43 Jesus tells them they “cannot” hear his words. And in verse 44 Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are children of the Devil – because they listen to the murderous lusts of Satan more than the truth of God!

So we see that while the Pharisees were bible-believers they were not God-followers or children of God. In fact they were children of the Devil with murderous instincts in their hearts – which is why they crucified Christ. Paul was caught up in this same hateful spirit until his Damascus Road experience and later writes:

Romans 10:1-4 MKJV *Brothers, truly my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is for it to be saved. (2) For I bear record to them that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.*

So we can see that bible-knowledge and zeal for God are insufficient for salvation. Many people caught up in cults and false religions have Scripture knowledge and zeal for God yet there is frequently a deep self-righteous obstinacy that blocks them from entering the Kingdom of God.

There must also be humble submission to God, connection to God and acceptance of the righteousness that is by faith (not works). There has to be a personal opening of the spirit and of the conscience to Jesus Christ. There needs to be a new creation, an inner work that writes the law of God, not just in a book, but deep in the human heart and mind so that the true Christian hears God's Words and is 'taught of God'.

Returning to 1 Corinthians chapter 2:

1 Corinthians 2:13-16 MKJV *(13) These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (14) But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (15) But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged by no one. (16) For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

The natural man cannot receive spiritual things but the spiritual man can receive knowledge from God. Thus Christianity is not a philosophy – a human system of logic that can be understood with a sufficiently intelligent natural mind. Nor is Christianity a religious system of commentary and counter-commentary. Christianity is a living faith where we exercise personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and He in turn teaches us, day by day, to follow Him, through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

We all start in such different places that no single philosophical or theological system can bring us all to maturity in Christ. We need a personal coach every step of the way and that Coach is the Holy Spirit of God.

How God Coaches You

Yesterday we found that the Holy Spirit is our 'paraclete' – that is our individual Coach who guides each of us into salvation and helps each of us to be transformed into the image of God's beloved Son:

Romans 8:29 ISV *For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 HCSB *(17) Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (18) We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Now what does this coaching ministry look like in action? There are at least seven areas that the Holy Spirit coaches us into:

1. The Holy Spirit coaches the sinner into salvation by convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8)
2. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the Christian (John 14:16,17,26, Ephesians 1:17)
3. The Holy Spirit sheds love abroad in the heart of the believer (Romans 5:5) and helps us to be strong in the inner man so we can know the love of God in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:14-21) and teaches us to love others also (1 Thessalonians 4:9).
4. The Holy Spirit imparts wisdom, balance, good judgment and a calm spirit of excellent discernment. (Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:9, James 3:17,18)
5. The Holy Spirit coaches us into Christian character and fruitfulness (Galatians 5:22,23) and helps us with our prayer life (Romans 8:26)
6. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to endure life's trials, by comforting us, encouraging us and enabling us to endure patiently. (Colossians 1:11,12, 2 Timothy 1:7, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
7. The Holy Spirit imparts power for Christian witness (Acts 1:8) and grants gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

But what does this coaching look like and what does it feel like? Is it a booming voice from Heaven? A subtle nudge? A feeling? An "Aha" moment of enlightenment? Well booming voices from Heaven are rather rare!

The coaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is generally a quiet, insistent, inner work of God that keeps on nudging us in a certain very positive direction. Sometimes we oppose it and 'go kicking and screaming' into salvation or into a ministry or calling of some sort. More often it is just something that grows within us, often just at or even below our level of consciousness and which gradually transforms us so that we start seeing the world differently, and then start feeling and reacting differently.

For instance if you pray for the gift of administration you may suddenly start to see how things should be put in order and how things can best be done as God downloads these things into your human spirit via the Holy Spirit.

Let's work two contrasting examples around the Christian calling to love one another:

Mr. Self-Sufficient takes the approach of "powerless religion" and self-help. This person gets out his Greek books and studies the meaning of 'agape love' and pores over the commentaries and all the self-help books. He can define love exactly and knows what love is and can preach a great sermon on love - but still cannot keep his temper when his wife annoys him. That is because his knowledge is mere human knowledge. Any intelligent person, Christian or non-Christian, can read the same books, and come to the same conclusions and even preach the same sermon. As someone who once briefly sat under a 'knowledgeable' but completely unsaved pastor I know that this is possible.

On the other hand Mercy the Christian realizes she cannot love unless God puts love within her heart. So she cries out for love. She asks God to teach her how to love. She knows she is bankrupt on her own. And the Holy Spirit starts shedding God's love abroad in her heart. She starts seeing the world with loving eyes. She starts understanding people's feelings and being of practical help. Love becomes a growing inner awareness within Mercy's life. Her perception subtly starts to change to be more loving, her desires start to be molded in a different direction and new loving attitudes and actions begin to emerge from within her.

Mercy now knows she is loved by God and she knows that she wants to love others. Sacrifice becomes easy and natural and selfishness seems increasingly horrid to her. She is appalled by cruelty and her patience with people grows every day. As she reads the Bible she sees countless commands to love and examples of love and she finds herself more and more able to put them into practice. Mercy also now finds herself more willing and able to follow the loving examples of those over her in the faith (Hebrews 13:7).

When she is unloving there is an inner prompting to apologize, to correct it and to do better next time. Every day, in many different ways, Mercy finds God the Holy Spirit alongside her teaching her how to love, how to be kind, how to show compassion and so on. In the ordinary days, the good days and especially on the tough days He is there showing her how to be a loving Christian in the midst of it all. Her knowledge is supernatural knowledge, spiritual knowledge, imparted directly to Mercy's spirit by God.

It is in our spirit that our deepest 'knowing' happens. The spirit is the lamp of our souls. Our spirit is where our true inner wisdom resides and it is where God teaches us to follow Christ in all humility and godliness.

Now these two approaches are like chalk and cheese. And you can't digest the chalk!

The person who is taught by God, who is led by the Holy Spirit, is like Mercy the Christian. They experience a daily tutoring in the things of God. Their spiritual eyes are opened and a new wisdom is given to them. They are instructed in the inner man and their Christian life grows out of deep internal changes in Who they are becoming (they are becoming like Christ).

All Christians need to take the path of Mercy the Christian. We need to give up religious striving and legalism and the efforts of mere human knowledge. Instead we need to completely cast ourselves on God, and to regularly pray and to seek His changes, His instructions and His blessings within us (Ephesians 1:3, Matthew 7:7, 6:33).

And by faith we need to listen to the anointing which He has poured out on us(1 John 2:20,27) and hearken to God's revelations through the Holy Spirit - which reveal all that God has for us (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

Now most of this spiritual knowledge is 'unspectacular' and undramatic. It is about things such as how to be loving and kind, or how to evangelize, or how to be bold and courageous. Very few people get authentic revelations about the End Times. It is spiritual knowledge not because it is weird but because it is peaceful, good and heavenly (James 3:17) and because it is imparted spiritually (Ephesians 1:17,18).

Grace, Holiness & God As Coach

Grace is given to make us holy. Grace is not a license to sin any time we like. Grace is God's kindness to us so that we can keep on learning to follow Him. Grace (among many other things) involves God empowering us and teaching us inwardly as disciples, as learners from God, in the art of being a Christian.

When I was young we lived on a small steep hill which descended to a busy main road. One Christmas I received a bicycle and with a bit of pushing I rode it safely around the house. I then (mistakenly) decided to ride down the hill. But no one had told me how to put on the old-fashioned back-pedal brakes! The bicycle went quickly downhill until I was faced with the choice of the busy main road or a muddy ditch. I chose the ditch. Grace is your Heavenly Father pulling you out of the muddy ditch you have ended up in and teaching you how to ride your bicycle properly so you do not end up back in the ditch again!

There are many aspects to grace (and they often overlap in meaning)– for instance:

- a) The gracious removal of a legal fine or penalty. Forgiveness, wiping the slate clean.
- b) Grace as the practical working power of sanctification, cleansing and renewal
- c) Grace as a gift of ability strength, power or endurance.
- d) Grace as imparting spiritual gifts and miracles - 'charismata' (literally grace gifts)
- e) Grace as an attribute of God, His kindness to us, God's Riches At Christ's Expense
- f) The throne of grace – the experience of God's prayer answering power in time of need
- g) The special favor and blessing of God upon an individual life
- h) The grace that operates in us prior to salvation and leads us to be saved
- i) The grace of God's choosing us in Him before the foundation of the world

All these aspects of grace are centered in the love of God, in the character of God Himself and in His faithfulness to His covenant promises that are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. Grace is not an impersonal spiritual force that is imparted by ritual or by association with holy artifacts. Grace is God Himself at work in our lives.

The first impression I got of grace (as a young Christian) was that it was just God wiping the slate clean after I had sinned. I would make a mistake, God would forgive, and then it was up to me to figure out how to do better next time and to get it right from that point on. God was the Heavenly Scorekeeper, and Christ made sure I never went negative, but I had to make all the plays, get all the runs and figure out how to play the game!

This was a very stressful view of God and of grace that eventually led to me being spiritually burned out. But what is the correct view of grace?

Romans 8:31-39 MKJV *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) Truly He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (33) Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is he condemning? It is Christ who has died, but rather also who is raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." (37) But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Along with Jesus God freely gives us 'all things' - that is God gives us everything we require to become sons and daughters of the living God. That includes His comfort, His coaching and inner tuition, His power and might, His insight and understanding, and many other things. We do not have to struggle on our own. God is not just the Divine Scorekeeper – He is right there with us, on the field, helping us with every play.

So what happens if you sin? As you repent, God forgives, as you ask for cleansing He cleanses (1 John 1:9) and as you ask for power to be holy and to resist future temptation Christ intercedes in the heavenlies (Romans 8:34) asking that you be strengthened with might in the inner man (Ephesians 3:14-21).

Grace involves the actual experience of God's unconditional love for you. God does not want you to go around feeling guilty all day (that is the Law). Instead God wants you to go around feeling loved by God every minute of the day. The above verses in Romans 8 plainly state that 'nothing can separate us from the love of Christ'. Sin was dealt with at the cross, and since then no power, principality or life circumstance can stop the flow of God's love towards you!

Indeed a good family that produces godly balanced successful children is always a family in which unconditional love abounds. It is a family where people are simply loved for who they are, no strings attached. On the other hand dysfunctional families are often grace-less, condemning, and harsh. In a similar vein God's love, which is God's grace, matures us into His image.

Romans 5:5 MKJV *And hope does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.*

Ephesians 3:16-19 MKJV *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, (19) and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

The Highway of Holiness

In the last few studies we have seen that the Holy Spirit is our loving personal Coach (or comforter, counselor, advocate – Gk. Paraclete) who instructs each of us in how to be holy so that we can become like Jesus. Today we will look at two verses from the book of Isaiah that tell us something about this process of divine instruction:

Isaiah 30:21 MKJV *And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.*

Isaiah 35:5-10 MKJV *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. (6) Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness waters shall break out, and streams in the desert. (7) And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land shall become springs of water in the home of jackals, in its lair, and a place for the reed and rush. (8) And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The Way of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it. But He shall be with them; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err in it. (9) No lion shall be there, nor any beast of prey shall go up on it; it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. (10) And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

When we go astray to the right or to the left the Holy Spirit corrects us saying 'this is the way, walk ye in it'. This is like the GPS in my car, which when I go off course, or miss a freeway exit says 'recalculating' and then gives me new instructions to get me back on track.

The Holy Spirit also opens our spiritual eyes so that we perceive spiritual truth and our spiritual ears are unstopped so we can hear God. We are spiritually strengthened so we are no longer weak in the profession of our faith and we find ourselves finally able to truly praise God and we are released to worship Him.

Our parched souls are filled with the living waters of God and become pools and springs of water. Out of our innermost being shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38)! What once was dry and barren shall be completely saturated and even 'swampy' like a wetland system.

There will be a highway there with unique properties. The ransomed and redeemed will be completely safe upon it. They will not go astray (even if they are foolish) or be attacked even if they are vulnerable. This highway shall connect them with Heaven, with the Zion that is above, the heavenly Jerusalem of faith (Hebrews 12:22-24, Revelation 3:12, 14:1, 21:2).

Now what sort of highway cannot be trodden on by wild beasts or by the unclean? Obviously this highway is not a literal road. This highway is a safe spiritual path to Heaven. It is the way that was established by Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). The new and living Way that was consecrated through His flesh (Hebrews 10:20).

This highway is so safe that even the fool cannot go astray in it (if he or she is saved). Thus the highway is not a path that requires a lot of books or brains. Once the spiritual eyes and spiritual ears of a person are opened (Isaiah 35:5) the highway becomes safe for them because they

hear the directions of God the Holy Spirit. This is why even the most simple believers have no problem at all in following Jesus Christ.

The guidance of God is a blessed inner work that results in living waters flowing out of the Christian and great joy and worship being released. The increasing presence of God in the heart of the believer simply banishes all sorrow and sighing:

...but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

It is a happy highway! God guides us into peace so that we may rejoice in the Lord always:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 ISV (16) *Always be joyful. (17) Continually be prayerful. (18) In everything be thankful, because this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you. (19) Do not put out the Spirit's fire. (20) Do not despise prophecies. (21) Instead, test everything. Hold on to what is good, (22) but keep away from every kind of evil. (23) May the God of peace himself make you holy in every way. And may your whole being-spirit, soul, and body-be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do this.*

So we see that the Highway of Holiness is safe, joyful, peaceful, thankful and prayerful. It is not an anxious striving, rather it operates in the confidence that God is faithful and will do it.

If this is the case then why are so many Christians feeling dry, barren and discouraged? Why is there little or no sign of the highway of holiness in their lives? There are a number of reasons: Many have not learned how to tune in to God and to His directions. They may have been taught to distrust such 'subjectivity'. Yet others are trying to steer themselves. They are determined to figure it all out. We cannot do that. The holy things are quite simply beyond us. Others are caught up in 'works' and are trying to earn what God has freely given to us. But God wants sons not slaves.

Let God bless you. Pray in the name of Jesus and ask that He might lead you and guide you so that you will find yourself rejoicing as you travel along the Highway of Holiness.

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit Part 1

In yesterday's study we looked at the spiritually overflowing Christian life. A life so drenched with God that the dry ground became a 'spiritual wetland'. Now the Greek word for immersed is 'baptizo' from which we get our word baptized. When we are drenched with God and immersed in Jesus we are baptized with the Holy Ghost. The next few studies will look at this baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:8 MKJV *I indeed have baptized you in water, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 3:11-12 MKJV *I indeed baptize you with water to repentance. But He who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire;*

Here John the Baptist is telling us that the baptism Jesus would administer would be different in nature and in kind from his baptism. John's baptism was 'with water unto repentance' while Jesus would be the one who would baptize with 'the Holy Spirit and fire'. Jesus Himself makes the difference plain at His Ascension:

Acts 1:4-5 MKJV *And having met with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father which you heard from Me. (5) For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*

A few verses later Jesus states the effect of this baptism in the Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8 MKJV *But you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Here we see that the baptism in the Holy Spirit in verse 5 is identical with 'the Holy Spirit coming upon you' in verse 8. This will prove a key observation later as we examine the difference between the Holy Spirit 'in' the believer and the Holy Spirit 'upon' us.

Now the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit within them after the resurrection:

John 20:22 ISV *When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*

So the Holy Spirit coming upon them, to baptize them in power was another blessing in addition to the Holy Spirit within them and they were to wait for it in Jerusalem.

Just to make things really confusing there seems to have been THREE 'baptisms' (Hebrews 6:2) in New Testament times: John's baptism, baptism in water in the name of Jesus, and baptism in the Holy Spirit. [Today we do not have John's baptism except for for a group in Iraq called the Mandeans that still follow John the Baptist]

First the distinction between baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit:

Acts 8:14-17 ISV *Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. (15) They went down and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. (16) Before this he had not come on any of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Up to the arrival of the apostles the Holy Spirit had not 'come upon' (baptized) any of them (v.16). The Samaritans who had accepted the gospel (v.14) had only been baptized in the name of Jesus (that is in water) (v.16). The Samaritans had believed and were baptized in water the name of Jesus but they were still missing something! So the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to them and they laid hands on the Samaritans and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Peter preaches the gospel the house of the Gentile centurion Ananias things happen in the opposite order with the baptism in the Holy Spirit coming first:

Acts 10:44-48 ISV *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all the people who were listening to his message. (45) Then the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles, too. (46) For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, (47) "No one can stop us from using water to baptize these people who have received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we did, can he?" (48) So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for several days.*

The Holy Spirit falls upon them (v.44), they speak in tongues and praise God (v.46), and all the Jewish believers present acknowledge that the gentiles had received the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' (v.45, 47). The Gentiles have already been baptized in the Spirit and Peter recognizes this and uses water (v.47) to baptize them 'in the name of Jesus Christ' (v.48).

So we see three separate related things: believing in Jesus, being baptized in water in Jesus' name, and having the Holy Spirit come upon the believer in power. A possible analogy is that it is similar to falling in love (believing), the marriage ceremony (baptism in water), and the consummation of the marriage (the Holy Spirit coming upon us, power to witness and to produce spiritual children).

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a baptism in the love of God where we praise and glorify His Name and receive the power to witness to Him among the nations of the world. Thus it is often accompanied by the verbal spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy.

Before I finish this study I would like to clear up any alarm and confusion and outline the difference between the Holy Spirit 'in' the believer (which happens at conversion) and the Holy Spirit 'upon' us (which may be a subsequent event).

The Holy Spirit within us is the internal work of God in our lives. It is our new nature and is received at conversion. The Holy Spirit within us produces the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience as well as imparting wisdom, revelation and a spirit of excellence and holiness. This is NOT a second experience. If you are a believer you have the Holy Spirit within you.

The Holy Spirit upon us is the external anointing for works of power, witness and ministry (Acts 1:8). It is the enabling work of God that imparts boldness (Acts 4:31) and spiritual gifts as the Holy Spirit Himself decides (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

Of course these are not entirely separate! They meet in the person of the Holy Spirit and the 'hinge' that connects the Holy Spirit within us and the Holy Spirit upon us is the filling of the Holy Spirit. This is where an external outpouring of the Holy Spirit also enters into us and fills us:

Acts 4:31 ISV *When they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

Ephesians 5:18-20 ISV *Stop getting drunk with wine, which leads to wild living, but keep on being filled with the Spirit. (19) Then you will recite to one another psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. You will sing and make music to the Lord with your hearts. (20) You will always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The Holy Spirit within is primary and is essential for salvation. We need a new nature, holiness, love and the fruit of the Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit upon us, is essential for courage, joy and power in ministry. Together they join up as the daily filling with the Holy Spirit and the abundant Christian life.

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit Part 2

So far we have seen that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is identical with the Holy Spirit coming upon a Christian (Acts 1:5,8) so that they are immersed in God and have power and boldness in ministry being equipped with spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.

We also saw there is a 3-part process that is found in the book of Acts:

- a) believing in the gospel and having the Holy Spirit placed within you at conversion to produce Christian character and good fruit
- b) being baptized in water in the name of Jesus
- c) being baptized in the Holy Spirit for the purpose of Christian witness.

In today's study we will look a bit further at the difference between the Holy Spirit in us, and the Holy Spirit upon us. First the work of the Spirit within us:

Galatians 5:22-23 MKJV *But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

These verses describe the work of the Holy Spirit in us – producing love, joy, peace and other internal qualities such as wisdom. The first bible character who is specifically called “Spirit-filled” is Bezalel the craftsman who built the tabernacle:

Exodus 31:1-5 MKJV *And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, (2) Behold, I, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. (3) And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all workmanship, (4) to devise designs; to work in gold, and in silver, and in bronze, (5) and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all workmanship.*

This filling is an internal work of God, which made Bezalel wise in his commissioned work. Later we find out that God also made him able to teach others also (Exodus 35:30-35) and that God gave wise hearts to those Bezalel instructed (Exodus 36:1,2).

Now for the work of the Holy Spirit as He comes upon believers:

Acts 2:14-21 MKJV *But Peter, standing up with the Eleven, lifted up his voice and said to them, Men, Jews, and all who dwell at Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words. (15) For these are not drunk as you suppose, for it is the third hour of the day. (16) But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: (17) "And it shall be in the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (18) And in those days I will pour out My Spirit upon My slaves and My slave women, and they shall prophesy. (19) And I will give wonders in the heaven above, and miracles on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. (20) The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before that great and glorious Day of the Lord. (21) And it shall be that everyone who shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

This is the Pentecostal outpouring of grace. In verse 17 it is described as "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh". This outpouring results in ecstatic states, speaking in tongues, prophecy, dreams, visions, miracles and Peter's ability to bear effective witness to Christ. There is an abundance of revelation for all believers and prophetic gifts are distributed to even the men-servants and maid-servants. And there is such revival power that 'all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The first bible characters who the Holy Spirit comes upon are the 70 elders:

Numbers 11:25-26 MKJV *And Jehovah came down in a cloud and spoke to him, and took of the spirit on him and gave it to the seventy elders. And it happened when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they never did so again. (26) But two of the men stayed in the camp; the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other was Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. And they were of those who were written, but did not go out to the tabernacle. And they prophesied in the camp.*

Here we see an ecstatic, temporary religious state accompanied by prophesy. It is not a quiet inner work! It is plain, obvious and observable by others:

Numbers 11:27-29 MKJV *And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. (28) And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, make them cease. (29) And Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would God that all Jehovah's people were prophets, that Jehovah would put His Spirit upon them!*

The Holy Spirit within a person changes their basic nature and character and gives them skill, gifts and wisdom that they retain and can use to teach others.

The Holy Spirit upon a person is for power in witness, revelation and testimony and for the imparting of special spiritual gifts such as tongues, healing and prophecy. It may not affect the person's inner character much at all. Samson frequently had the Spirit come upon him, but seems to have had very poor judgment and character (Judges 14:5,6; 15:14-16, 16:1-31). King Saul even had the Holy Spirit come upon him when he was pursuing David and was out of the Lord's favor. Saul was so affected that he disrobed and entered some kind of ecstatic state for about 24 hours (1 Samuel 19:18-24).

Samson and Saul show that mighty spiritual experiences alone are insufficient. The priority is holiness and Christian character and sanctification without which no one can see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). We need a deep and genuine repentance and true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the presence of the new creation within us (2 Corinthians 5:17). Once that is firmly established we should also seek to have power in ministry and the anointing on all we do - and seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit!

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit – Part 3

What sort of power does the baptism in the Holy Spirit give us and why is it important? This was a critical question for me as I was very anti-charismatic for many years and only slowly changed my mind as a result of several experiences on the mission field that led me to see an increase in the quality and quantity of the Christian life due to having a strong filling of the Holy Spirit. This journey took me the best part of a decade (from 1986 to 1995) and is too long to detail even briefly here.

My questions were: a) Is it biblical and is it real? b) Does it work? c) Is it safe? d) Is it worth the cost of any rejection I might receive? (In those days charismatics were often kicked out of churches and missionary societies or given minor roles in them). Over time I found 'yes' answers to all those questions. If you are still exploring may I say that God is generally in no hurry. Just go at the pace that you can honestly proceed at with intellectual and spiritual integrity.

Luke 11:9-13 MKJV *And I say to you, Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives. And he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it shall be opened. (11) For what father of you, if the son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake for a fish? (12) Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

The above passage informs us that it is safe to seek spiritual things, especially the Holy Spirit. God is a good Heavenly Father who gives good things to His children. He does not give scorpions instead of eggs or stones instead of bread – or by implication an evil spirit instead of the Holy Spirit. God will not spiritually deceive you as you seek Him. He is simply not like that. His Word, His character and His promises are assurance that it will be well with you as you seek His spiritual blessings.

The passage also assures us that we will receive what we ask for in God. This may take some persistent asking, seeking and knocking however such persistence will pay off in the end. (Also the verses immediately prior to these are about the parable of the persistent friend who receives his loaves of bread in the middle of the night.)

Now the epistle of James warns us that we must ask for godly things, not merely for worldly things to spend upon our lusts and pleasures (James 4:3). Yet in later verses James assures us of the power of persistent prevailing Kingdom prayer (James 5:13-18).

So we are not to ask for things to 'spend upon our lusts' but we are to ask for things to spend upon the Spirit! If we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Our minds are to be set on the Spirit and not on the flesh. And our prayers and our seeking God are to be for the things of the Spirit and not the things of the flesh (though our daily needs are fine and are part of the Lord's Prayer). Therefore we should especially pray for those things concerning the Holy Spirit that are promised to us in Scripture such as the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, and for the gifts of the Spirit especially that we may prophesy (1 Corinthians 14 – whole chapter).

The blessings we receive in Christ include 'all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 1:3). Surely we should ask for these also! We should even ask God to show us what these blessings are (1 Corinthians 2:9-13) so that we can receive them through prevailing prayer!

God is love (1 John 4:16) and in His amazing love He wishes to absolutely lavish us with free gifts from Heaven such as salvation, redemption, holiness, grace, peace, love, joy, boldness and spiritual power. Ephesians informs us that this grace-filled gift giving comes about because of Christ's triumphant resurrection and ascension into Heaven:

Ephesians 4:7-12 MKJV *But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (9) (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) (11) And truly He gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is this gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit from the ascended Lord Jesus so we can witness to Christ, receive spiritual gifts for ministry and operate in the various offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher.

The power we receive is the power to walk in the Holy Spirit and to do the things that the Holy Spirit wants done.

But what does the Holy Spirit want done? He wants people to be loved and to be built up in Christ, the saints to become holy, the lost saved, and the widows and orphans to be cared for. He wants truth to be proclaimed to those in power, the lepers cleansed, the sick healed, the demons cast out and the dead raised to life.

Matthew 10:7-8 MKJV *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.*

I can imagine if Jesus had personally said these words to me at the beginning of my ministry I would have said: "Raise the dead? Did He just say raise the dead? I've just prepared a great sermon on the doctrine of grace and Jesus is telling me to raise the dead?"

I would have raised a thousand objections to healing, exorcism, the raising of the dead and anything to do with leprosy (probably citing the need for a medical degree). I loved theology and knew my doctrine and that is where I was staying! More than that I knew I simply did not possess the power to do even the least of these things.

Since I have sought God's power for ministry through the baptism in the Holy Spirit I have graciously seen Him work some healings and many exorcisms through my ministry. This is not of me, it is of God. Freely I have received. I have yet to cleanse a leper or raise anyone from the dead. But I now know that it is not just up to me and my 'training and abilities'. It is up to God who works in me and through me. I do not understand how He works, but He does work.

Our original question was: What sort of power does the baptism in the Holy Spirit give us and why is it important? The answer is that the baptism in the Holy Spirit gives us power to carry out our God-given ministry. As we ask for more of God the Holy Spirit we surely will receive - and as we have freely received, we freely give.

Baptism In The Holy Spirit - 4

In our secular world we are used to an existence that is 'empty of God'. However the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the precise opposite – it is simply Jesus wanting everything to be filled with God!

Ephesians 4:10 MKJV *He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.*

Jesus wants a God-filled earth! He wants the glory of God to cover the whole world!

Habakkuk 2:14 HCSB *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea.*

Pentecost was the initial outbreak of this filling of all things with the glory of God:

Acts 2:32-35 MKJV *God raised up this Jesus, of which we all are witnesses. (33) Therefore being exalted to the right of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear. (34) For David has not ascended into the heavens, but he says himself, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand (35) until I place Your enemies as a footstool to Your feet."*

In these verses Peter explains to the Jews that:

- a) God raised Jesus from the dead
- b) That this Jesus was exalted in Heaven and seated at the right hand of God
- c) At this time Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit
- d) Jesus then pours out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh in fulfillment of the prophesy of Joel so that it is both audible and visible (*which you now see and hear*)
- e) That this is a sign that Jesus is triumphant and that God will place His enemies as a footstool under His feet (a quote from Psalm 110)

In study number 7 “Connecting Heaven and Earth” we saw that one of the Lord's purposes is to reconnect the broken relationship between Heaven and Earth so that 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done - on earth as it is in Heaven’ becomes a reality. When Jesus went into the heavenlies, and poured out the Holy Spirit, there was a momentous occasion as God's Spirit began to invade the world once more - in the lives of Christians.

God pours out the Holy Spirit into us as 'earthen vessels' and we become 'temples of the Holy Spirit' (1 Corinthians 3:6, 6:19) and are empowered to be witness for Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). The fruit of the Spirit in our lives are a sign that God's will is being done on earth as it is in heaven. The gifts of the Spirit are given so we can edify each other and mature together as a holy community full of truth, love and goodness.

So Pentecost, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, is part of God's long-term plan to retake planet Earth and reconnect humanity with Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 MKJV (18) *And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) whereas God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and putting the word of reconciliation in us. (20) Then we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as God exhorting through us, we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (21) For He has made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

So with the baptism in the Holy Spirit connects us spiritually to the heavenly realms so that we can reconcile the world to God.

Now Jesus is the One who pours out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. It is only through Christ and His work on the cross that we can receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit according to His sovereign will. Which raises the question – what is His will in this matter? Peter answers that question a few verses later:

Acts 2:38-39 MKJV *Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

It is God's will that every repentant, baptized believer in Jesus Christ should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (both in them and upon them). The promise is not for just a select group or for people at a particular time but for the hearers, their future children, and for those afar off – indeed for 'as many as the Lord our God shall call'. So God wants all Christians everywhere to be filled with the Holy Spirit at all times.

While it is a promise yet it must be sought in faith. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not some optional extra in the Christian life. Something that is nice to have perhaps 'if you are inclined that way". Nor is it 'an experience' as if it was the spiritual equivalent of a roller-coaster ride at Disneyland. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a direct result of Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection and ascension into Heaven and is poured out as part of His reign so that His Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit helps us to worship God more powerfully (Hallowed be thy name) proclaim the gospel (Thy kingdom come) and live the Christian life with love and joy (Thy will be done). It integrates with all the other aspects of the Christian faith since it is simply God filling us with Himself - so that we in turn may fill the world with His glory.

Baptism In The Holy Spirit Part 5

In this study I will tackle two very practical questions: How then can we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit? And why do some Christians lack deeper spiritual experiences despite having good character and moral lives?

In answer to the first question, there are at least two methods of receiving the Spirit mentioned in the book of Acts:

A) Direct reception when He is poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and at Cornelius' place (Acts 10:44-45)

B) Receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands - when the apostles went to Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), when Saul's eyes were opened and he was filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17) and later when Paul laid hands on the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6).

In a powerful revival the Holy Spirit may be poured out on a whole group of people and they will be simultaneously be baptized in the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost. Others receive the Spirit through personal ministry and the laying on of hands. Christians have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while praying at home or, in one famous case that began the modern Pentecostal movement, the Spirit was received during devotions at a bible college in Topeka, Kansas.

The laying on of hands also seems to be involved in ministry such as in the commissioning of Saul (Paul) and Barnabas, and in the imparting of spiritual gifts to Timothy:

Acts 13:2-3 HCSB *As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to." (3) Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.*

1 Timothy 4:14 HCSB *Do not neglect the gift that is in you; it was given to you through prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.*

2 Timothy 1:6 HCSB *Therefore, I remind you to keep ablaze the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

From these examples it seems to me that we should:

- a) Fervently pray for more and more of God's infilling and power for ministry and
- b) Seek the imparting anointing and spiritual gifts for ministry by the laying on of hands of senior Christian leaders who have integrity and good Christian character and who are clearly already moving in the Holy Spirit.

God may personally visit us with an outpouring of grace during our quiet times, or even while we are driving! Or the Lord may put us next to somebody who can impart wisdom and spiritual gifts to us via prophecy and the laying on of hands. We cannot dictate the method of the blessing – but we should still seek the blessing!

Now for the second question that this study is addressing. Some Christians cry out: 'But I have served the Lord faithfully all these years, why don't I have any of these spiritual experiences'. The answer is in the statement itself. The person is seeking God's blessing because of his or her service to God, and not by faith and trust in a God who has promised those blessings. They are trying to earn the free gift, instead of just receiving it by faith. We inherit spiritual blessings through promises – and not through works or laws or any effort of the flesh:

Galatians 3:2-5 HCSB *I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3) Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so much for nothing--if in fact it was for nothing? (5) So then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law or by hearing with faith?*

We only receive the Holy Spirit through hearing and through faith in the promise of God. We do not receive the Holy Spirit by obeying laws, being good, or having the right theology. This even applies to ministry in the Holy Spirit:

Acts 3:12 HCSB *When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him walk?"*

It is not your theology, or your wisdom or your good moral life that will cause you to receive the Holy Spirit, but only your faith in God who has promised the Spirit to you:

Galatians 3:14,22,29 HCSB *The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.(22) But the Scripture has imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe... (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.*

You also have to stop looking at yourself and your own unworthiness and saying "God would never bless me I am too much of a mess'. That is just a reverse form of the works doctrine. The Samaritan woman had a shattered moral life, a huge inferiority complex, and poor theology but Jesus told her that the Holy Spirit could be hers, then and there, just for the asking:

John 4:9-10 HCSB *"How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" she asked Him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. (10) Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would ask Him, and He would give you living water."*

The Holy Spirit is the free gift of God. If we ask Jesus he will give us this Living Water to all who ask it of Him in faith. That is the Promise. (Acts 2:33,38,39; Acts 3:14, Ephesians 1:13)

Luke 11:13 HCSB *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*

Revelation 21:6 MKJV *And He said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who thirsts I will give of the fountain of the Water of Life freely.*

How To Receive Spiritual Blessings By Faith

All spiritual blessings come through Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and are received by faith, as a result of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8,9) and they are in turn conveyed to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-16, Galatians 3:1-5).

Spiritual blessings are not earned (Romans 4:1-5), nor do they come through works (Ephesians 2:8,9) or through obedience to any religious law (Galatians 2:16) and they do not come via our own power or godliness (Acts 3:12). In fact there is nothing you can 'do' in the normal (unregenerate) human nature that will please God:

Galatians 2:16 HCSB *yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified.*

Micah 6:6-8 HCSB *What should I bring before the LORD when I come to bow before God on high? Should I come before Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? (7) Would the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the child of my body for my own sin? (8) He has told you men what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: Only to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.*

It is the internal state of our heart, our love, faith and humility, that pleases God. Some people go to church and receive a great spiritual blessing, others go to the same identical service and receive absolutely nothing from God. Both have done the same external action yet for one person it has great profit and for the other person it profits nothing. If the externals are the same, then the difference must be internal factors – that is in the heart of the Christian.

Spiritual blessings such as love, joy, peace, wisdom, revelation, spiritual gifts, and the ability to have patience with others; these things come from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). And these blessings can come through believing prayer and intercession:

James 1:5-7 HCSB *Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (7) That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*

Colossians 1:9 ISV *For this reason, since the day we heard about this, we have not stopped praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*

Paul's prayer in Ephesians chapter 3 is an excellent example of praying for spiritual blessings:

Ephesians 3:14-19 MKJV *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, (16) that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, (19) and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Some may ask: How can I be blessed - I do not deserve to be blessed?

Lets' look at what Paul says with great boldness in the book of Romans:

Romans 4:5 HCSB *But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares righteous the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.*

The thief on the cross did no religious works, and was not of good character, in fact he admitted that he was deserving of death and yet he asked for mercy and was given salvation. He called upon God who justifies the ungodly.

It is not your respectability that gets you blessed – but your faith. Many people who were not respectable, tax-gatherers like Matthew, the Samaritan woman, prostitutes and others were welcomed into the Kingdom of God while the respectable religious leaders did not enter in.

Matthew 21:31 MKJV *Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, The first. Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that the tax-collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

Yesterday we saw that the Holy Spirit was received by hearing with faith (Galatians 3;1-5) and today we have seen that wisdom is received by faith (James 1:5-8) and right standing with God (justification) is received, even by those who do no good deeds, simply by hearing with faith (Romans 4:1-25). So then nothing depends on works, and everything depends on faith. But faith in what? There are four passages I want to bring to light:

Ephesians 1:3 MKJV *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ;*

Ephesians 2:4-7 MKJV *But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us (5) (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved), (6) and has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 3:7-9,29 MKJV *Therefore know that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham. (8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations through faith, preached the gospel before to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all nations be blessed." (9) So then those of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham..... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.*

Hebrews 6:11-15 MKJV *And we desire that each one of you show the same eagerness to the full assurance of hope to the end, (12) that you be not slothful, but imitators of those who*

through faith and patience inherit the promises. (13) For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, "Surely in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply you." (15) And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

These verses show us in turn that:

- a) God has already blessed us with all the blessings in the heavenly realms
- b) That God has seated us in these heavenly realms, simply by His grace and kindness.
- c) That part of this is that we inherit the blessings of Abraham
- d) That we will inherit these blessings the same way that Abraham did – by faith and patience in the promises of God

Two Principles

How can we be blessed? How can we have God's spiritual blessings poured out in our hearts and lives?

The two big principles for receiving blessings are:

- 1) We generally only receive as much grace as we think we need (and)
- 2) God generally treats us in the same way that we treat others

Let's start with some verses from the Sermon On The Mount that illustrate these principles:

Matthew 5:3-9 MKJV *Blessed are the poor in spirit! For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (4) Blessed are they that mourn! For they shall be comforted. (5) Blessed are the meek! For they shall inherit the earth. (6) Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness! For they shall be filled. (7) Blessed are the merciful! For they shall obtain mercy. (8) Blessed are the pure in heart! For they shall see God. (9) Blessed are the peacemakers! For they shall be called the sons of God.*

Here Jesus connects receiving blessing with:

- A) Having a strong need or desire for blessing (those who mourn, those who are poor in spirit, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness)
- B) Treating other people well (the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers)

In stark contrast, those who do not fervently seek after God, are not blessed:

James 4:2 MKJV *You desire, and do not have. You murder, and are jealous, and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you have not because you ask not.*

And those who treat others rudely and harshly have their prayers hindered:

1 Peter 3:7 HCSB *Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

So if we want spiritual blessings we should press into them with some intensity, feeling poor and needy and hungering and thirsting after the things of God. There is a necessary sense of emptiness, lowliness and desperation. We need to cry out to God.

James 4:6 MKJV *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.*

Spiritual pride is a great danger because we think we have it all or know it all and once that happens our ability to be blessed is very limited:

1 Corinthians 4:7-10 HCSB *(7) For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it? (8) Already you are full! Already you are rich! You have begun to reign as kings without us--and I wish you did reign, so that we also could reign with you! (9) For I think God has displayed us,*

the apostles, in last place, like men condemned to die: we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men. (10) We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!

In the above verses Paul is being very sarcastic. He is punching holes in the spiritual pride of the Corinthian church which was going around saying things like: "we are kings, we are full, we are rich, we reign!" Paul points out their folly and his neediness.

Earlier Paul had dealt with their intellectual pride:

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 MKJV *(18) Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool so that he may be wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; for it is written, "He takes the wise in their own craftiness." (20) And again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."*

A vessel that thinks that it is full cannot be further filled. If you want blessings you must so intensely realize that you need those blessings that you cry out in desperation for them:

Mark 10:46-52 MKJV *And they came to Jericho. And as He with His disciples and a large crowd went out of Jericho, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, was sitting by the side of the highway, begging. (47) And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! (48) And many warned him that he should be quiet, but he cried a great deal more, Son of David, have mercy on me! (49) And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Be of good comfort; rise up, He is calling you. (50) And casting away his garment, he rose up and came to Jesus. (51) And answering Jesus said to him, What do you desire that I should do to you? The blind man said to Him, My Lord, that I may see again. (52) And Jesus said to him, Go, your faith has healed you. And instantly he saw again, and he followed Jesus in the way.*

The second principle is that, generally speaking, God treats us as we treat others. He shows mercy to the merciful and so on.

Matthew 5:7 MKJV *Blessed are the merciful! For they shall obtain mercy.*

James 2:13 MKJV *For he who has shown no mercy shall have judgment without mercy, and mercy exults over judgment.*

Luke 6:36-38 MKJV *Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (37) Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. (38) Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over, they shall give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you measure, it shall be measured to you again.*

Abundant blessings are poured out on the kind, the generous, the merciful and the forgiving! On the other hand, in Matthew 18:21-35 Peter asks about how often he should be forgiving and merciful. Jesus replies 'seventy times seven' - in other words, all the time, just as God forgives us. Jesus then goes on to tell the terrifying parable of the Unmerciful Servant whose appalling conduct gets him handed over to the torturers by the King. Hard-hearted people receive no blessing at all, rather they end up in spiritual torment.

Some may say: Now isn't this 'works' and how can it be by faith? Let us look at the process as a whole. We receive freely by faith and we give freely as a result of that faith, and as we give freely from faith more blessings flow back in to us and then we can give back out again.

Matthew 10:8 MKJV *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.*

At no point did we receive the blessing because we were 'good'. We received the blessing because we asked and thirsted and cried out and because after we received it we then acted in faith so as to pass it along to others also.

If God gives to us freely and we decide to keep it inside and never share it, or if we think we have no need of His free gift in the first place, then the whole faith-filled process stops in its tracks. We receive freely by faith and we give freely by faith treating others with the same gracious freedom that God has blessed us with. That is only just and fair and right. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Seeking The Positive Blessing

In the last study on Two Principles we found that the blessings which come by faith come to those who seek them from a deep sense of personal need (poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness etc). And that those who receive blessings should pass the blessings along to others by being meek, generous, accepting, kind and merciful.

Today we will explore the principle of 'hungering and thirsting' after righteous things – which may include everything from your daily bread to the salvation of your friends and family. In particular we will look at the principle of 'asking for the positive blessing'.

God is always positive in nature:

1 John 1:5 MKJV *And this is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*

God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. There is no darkness of any kind: no evil, no anxiety, no fear, and no dread. He is never surly, negative, small-minded or petty. Even God's justice is fair and righteous and serves a positive purpose in protecting the innocent from harm. Since we have such a positive God, who is light, then our prayers and desires should be for the things of the light.

We should pray for the positive. We should pray for things such as joy, peace, provision, strength, protection, and wisdom. Since God's character is light and is positive then we are most aligned with him when we are in the light and when we are positive in our requests. We need to ask for the positive, godly, desired end state. That is for what the situation would look like when the situation has been completely resolved. Let's look at some examples from the life of Jesus Christ:

Mark 4:38-39 MKJV *And He was in the stern of the boat, asleep on a headrest. And they awakened Him and said to Him, Master, do You not care that we perish? (39) And He awakened and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

The disciples were calling out of fear “Master do You not care that we perish?” while Jesus (who is always in the Light) spoke the desired positive solution into being by commanding “Peace, be still!”

Luke 8:53-55 MKJV *And they ridiculed, knowing that she was dead. (54) And He put them all out. And He took her by the hand and called, saying, Little girl, arise! (55) And her spirit came again, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that food be given her to eat.*

Everyone except Jesus sees the negative – a dead girl. Jesus however sees a potential miracle and simply commands the positive into being “Little girl arise”, and the positive blessing comes to pass.

John 11:43-44 MKJV *And saying these things, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, Here! Outside! (44) And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with sheets, and his face was bound with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Untie him and let him go!*

Jesus envisions Lazarus coming forth and commands the positive blessing (a living walking Lazarus) into being. Similarly when confronted with a leper He commands the desired end state “Be cleansed”, or when confronted with a demon Jesus simply says “Come out” . Jesus' method is to out-bless the curse. In other words He focuses on the positive so that when it is realized it completely swallows up the negative.

The apostles applied this same principle when they healed they lame man at the Gate Beautiful:

Acts 3:6-8 MKJV *But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk! (7) And taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. (8) And leaping up, he stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.*

By commanding the blessing (rise up and walk) the problem of lameness is automatically swallowed up and dealt with! So the principle is: That we create a positive picture of the blessing that will out-bless the curse and we then pray for that positive and real blessing to be made manifest. Now the principle of praying for he positive alternative can be applied as follows:

Instead of praying “Lord remove my temper” - pray “Lord fill me with the Holy Spirit and with love and patience and self-control”. If you have the Spirit and love, patience and self-control then these will out-bless the curse and your temper will be dealt with!

And instead of fearing financial ruin pray something like this: “Lord I think You that will supply all my needs out of Your riches in glory. I ask for your righteous and powerful provision so that we can be free of debt and meet all our financial obligations. Lord we also ask for an abundance according to your word 'and there shall be some left over' (2 Kings 4:43,44, 2 Chronicles 31:10, Luke 9:17). In Jesus wonderful Name. Amen.”

Instead of praying “Lord please don't let me lose my job” pray “Lord give me great favor with my boss and with the company and with all who deal with me and give me a spirit of excellence so that I am the most valuable employee at work so that I retain my job and even am promoted.”

And instead of praying “O Lord don't let me fail this exam” you should ask for the positive – that God would give you wisdom and concentration , help you to study and retain the right material and would give you a peaceful heart so that you can do your best on the day.

Instead of crying “Lord keep me out of sexual sin” pray “Lord give me a spirit of wisdom, purity, godliness and self-restraint. Fill me with the Holy Spirit and the fear of the Lord so that I always remember that my body is a temple of Your Holy Spirit. And lead me not into temptation and place my feet upon the paths of righteousness for Your Name's sake”.

The light swallows up the darkness so pray for the light! When you are irritable - pray to be filled with peace, when you are starting to be judgmental - pray to be filled with mercy, when you think the whole world is filled with stupid people - pray for forbearance, and when you find yourself cold and selfish - pray to be set on fire by the love of God.

One word of caution - this biblical picture of the positive is not highly materialistic, nor is it loaded with pride and selfish ambition. By all means pray for your needs, and even for justice but not for worldly desires or for revenge. We must pray as children of the light.

By fervently praying for the biblical, positive, creative solution we are automatically exercising our faith in the character of a God who is Light in all that He does.

James 5:16 Webster .. The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.

What Do You Desire That I Should Do For You?

What would you do if God asked you: "What do you desire that I should do for you"?

Mark 10:51-52 MKJV *And answering Jesus said to him, What do you desire that I should do to you? The blind man said to Him, My Lord, that I may see again. (52) And Jesus said to him, Go, your faith has healed you. And instantly he saw again, and he followed Jesus in the way.*

Now why would Jesus bother asking such questions? Surely He already knew the answers? The need to ask specifically is for *our benefit*. God already knows what we need even before we ask! **Matthew 6:8 MKJV** *for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him.*

We are creatures who need to ask specific things from our Creator. The grace of God is often for specific situations such as healing, temptation, daily bread, and the challenges of ministry. His blessings are tailored to our daily requirements.

And as we saw in an earlier study, we generally only get as much grace as we think we need. Pride and self-sufficiency are a great blockage to blessing - while poverty of spirit and being spiritually hungry are among the keys to blessing. So we often need to ask, humbly and specifically, for that which we need from God.

When we ask specific things from God we will find at least seven benefits:

1. We acknowledge our need and become humble before God
2. We grow in faith and boldness as we see God answer specific, concrete requests
3. We become practiced in prayer
4. We have a daily walk with God – asking Him into every situation of life
5. We learn more about what God wants us to ask of Him
6. We develop a testimony of what the Lord has done for us over the years
7. As our stubborn pride and independence vanish our relationships improve

We also need to believe that God wants to fulfill your desires:

Psalms 37:4 HCSB *Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart's desires.*

Psalms 145:15-16 MKJV *The eyes of all wait on You; and You give them their food in due season. (16) You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

Indeed God is a rewarder of those that seek Him: **Hebrews 11:6 MKJV** *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

The phrase 'diligently seek Him' is important. There is a degree of diligence required even in the spiritual realm. Hannah had to get to the point of emotional desperation before she was noticed by Eli and received God's blessing; Zaccheus had to climb the sycamore tree; the Syrophenician woman had to press in and give a good reply to Jesus testing statements; and it was the blind men who cried out noisily that received the miracle while the bystanders were not particularly blessed at all.

Proverbs 13:4 Webster *The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*

The great saints had a kind of focused emptiness before God. They were persistently asking, seeking, knocking, mourning, hungering, thirsting, and praying in the Spirit at all times, looking to the Lord for the answers to their prayers.

[Now I do not mean 'emptiness' as in having a blank mind but rather being empty and poor in spirit, having no ego, pride or independence with regard to our Creator. It is the lowly empty vessel that is filled from above.]

The men and women of faith were always able to say something when God asked them what they desired Him to do for them. When God appeared to Abraham he had a very specific answer – a male heir. Faith believes that God will do specific positive, tangible and real things. Faith believes that God rewards and answers our deepest desires.

There are those who take a very philosophical line and say that we should not request earthly rewards from God but should just ask for vague spiritual blessings, and perhaps not even that. They often say 'we should seek the Giver and not the gift'.

While this sounds very noble it is frequently designed to dodge the uncomfortable realities of specific answers to prayer. God tells us, again and again to “ask” . Asking is good. Asking is obedience.

Matthew 7:7-8 Webster *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened to you: (8) For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, the door shall be opened.*

Matthew 21:22 Webster *And all things whatever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

John 14:13-14 Webster *And whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

How can we put this into practice? One good way is to keep a prayer diary ruled up into three columns: a wide column in which you write prayer requests, and two narrower columns in which you put the date requested and the date the prayer is answered. You may even keep such a prayer diary in your home church or bible study group so all the members can submit prayer requests and see the results of believing group prayer.

Another method is fasting – where you skip a meal and seek God about a particular matter. This shows you are serious and intent on solving that problem or having an answer from God in that particular matter. Sketch the problem out before the Lord. Even write a letter to God about it. But present it clearly before the Lord with all your heart.

And remember to picture the positive faith outcome. Ask for the positive solution, the positive blessing that you want from God. Describe what it would look like when God has entered into the situation e.g. “Lord I wish to be made well”.

Waiting On The Lord

Walking in the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit, involves sensitivity to not only **what** God wants done, but also **when** He wants that thing done. Timing is important. When the timing is wrong a powerful engine can be shaken into many pieces. But when the timing is right the same engine can produce hundreds of horsepower. There is a proper spiritual timing for all things:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 HCSB *(1) There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven: (2) a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; (3) a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; (4) a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; (5) a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to avoid embracing; (6) a time to search and a time to count as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away; (7) a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak; (8) a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace...(11) He has made everything appropriate in its time.*

These 'times' are seasons of the Spirit, moments of grace. Just as someone might say to you 'this is not the right time to mention a pay raise'. Here 'a time' means the appropriate time and does not have anything much to do with clock time. The Scriptures have a number of views of time:

1. Immediately - the instant moment, especially mentioned in Mark's Gospel
2. Eternity – time without end, time in God's Presence, everlasting to everlasting
3. Clock Time – the third hour, the ninth hour, the third watch of the night
4. Calendar Time - months, seasons, years, the third year of King Hezekiah etc
5. Cyclical time – time as repeating itself, as if the days of the year / history were on a looped string. Mainly mentioned in Job and Ecclesiastes
6. Event Time – after X then Y, that is the first event must be completed before the second event will occur e.g the gospel of the Kingdom being preached to all nations....and then the end shall come
7. Seasonal Time – a time for love and a time for hate, see above. The appropriate time or season in which to undertake an activity
8. Prophetic Time – the future being seen in the present, eternity being glimpsed in terms of present or past realities (sometimes past tense is used for future events). Sometimes a number of events hundreds of years apart are referred to in the same prophecy.

As we wait upon the Lord we will be waiting in one of these modes of time. The Spirit may tell us to pause because the time is not yet. Or we may be told to move quickly while there is an open door for the gospel, a window of opportunity for ministry.

God has His timing for His blessings, whether they be spiritual blessings or blessings of a more down-to-earth kind. We can wear ourselves out trying to make things happen before their time or we can wait upon the Lord, trusting Him for the perfect timing for all things:

Psalms 27:13-14 HCSB *I am certain that I will see the LORD's goodness in the land of the living. (14) Wait for the LORD; be courageous and let your heart be strong. Wait for the LORD.*

Psalms 37:34 HCSB *Wait for the LORD and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land. You will watch when the wicked are destroyed.*

Isaiah 40:31 Webster *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*

As we wait upon the Lord the Holy Spirit puts 'air under our wings' and we are raised high like an eagle lifted by a thermal air current in the deserts of Israel. When we wait upon God we cease from useless striving so that our energy is well expended and is often renewed so that we can run and not be weary and walk and not faint.

Waiting on God requires a lot of faith and hope. It is tempting to give up and solve it ourselves – especially when it is a deeply emotional issue such as a desire for justice: **Proverbs 20:22 Webster** *Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.*

Psalms 37:7-9 Webster *Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: ... Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. (9) For evil doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*

Those who wait upon the Lord will inherit the earth (Psalm 37:9) and even the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). The meek are those who can wait quietly for God to show up on their behalf. They are not angry, fretful or impatient. They do not throw their weight around in an obnoxious and carnal manner. They prefer to pray through life's problems than crash through in a fury.

However, waiting on the Lord is not the same as sitting on your hands! It is patient but it is not passive. Waiting on the Lord involves actively listening to the inner man, to the voice of Christ within you, to the leading of the Holy Ghost, so that you know God's timing in every matter.

For this you will need to activate your 'spiritual senses' – that is your spiritual eyes and ears so that you get to know the personal voice of God much more clearly. That will be the main topic in the second part of this series (today's study completes Workbook 1).

Hebrews 5:14 MKJV *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, even those who because of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

The senses that discern good and evil are not the normal faculties of touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. A person can have their physical senses in perfect working order and still be spiritually and morally undiscerning! These are spiritual senses and they must be attuned to spiritual realities.

Matthew 16:1-3 MKJV *The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Him, tempting Him. And they asked Him that He would show them a sign from Heaven. (2) He answered and said to them, When it is evening, you say, Fair weather; for the sky is red. (3) And in the morning, Foul weather today; for the sky is red and gloomy. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky, but you cannot see the signs of the times!*

The Pharisees had their physical senses intact and could work out the weather, but their spiritual senses were so dull that they could not recognize the times of their Messiah.

Matthew 13:14-15 MKJV *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which said, "By hearing you shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive; (15) for this people's heart has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have*

closed their eyes, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

We need the Spirit's timing. We need to be in tune with Heaven. We need to wait upon the Lord.

Review Questions

1. What are the main lessons that you have learned as you have studied this workbook?
2. Is there a particular Scripture that has really spoken to you? Write it out:
3. What have you learned about God the Father?
4. What have you learned about Jesus Christ?
5. What have you learned about the Holy Spirit?
6. How has your relationship with God improved?
7. How has your understanding of the Bible improved?
8. What is the New Covenant? (Study 1)
9. What is the relationship between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant? (Studies 1-2)
10. How do we live by faith in the precious promises of God ? (Study 3)
11. What is the New Nature? (Studies 4 & 5)
12. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? (Studies 1-5)
13. Write out Galatians 5:16-18 below:
14. What does Galatians 5:16-18 mean for the Spirit-led life?
15. Write out Romans 8:4-6 below:

Why is it important to have our mind set on the things of the Spirit? (Study 6)

16. What does God want to do with Heaven and Earth? (Study 7)
17. What is the 'kosmos' and what are Christians to do about it? (Study 8)
18. What is faith? (Study 9)
19. What does it mean to 'walk by faith'? (Studies 10-12)
20. How does the Holy Spirit act as our coach? (Study 13)
21. Why is holiness important? What is the relationship between grace and holiness? (Study 14)
22. What is the 'highway of holiness' ? (Study 15)
23. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? (Study 16)
24. What is the difference between the Holy Spirit "in" a Christian and "upon" a Christian? How does this relate to the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit? (Study 17)
25. What sort of power does the baptism in the Holy Spirit impart to the Christian? (Study 18)
26. Write out Ephesians 4:10 below:

How does Ephesians 4:10 relate to the baptism in the Holy Spirit? (Study 19)
27. How do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit? (Study 20)

Why do some Christians lack deeper experiences of the Holy Spirit? (Study 20)
28. How do we receive spiritual blessings? (Study 21)
 - a) By being very good and holy
 - b) By attending church and doing many religious good works
 - c) By hearing with faith(Now check your answer with Galatians 3:1-5)

29. We receive as much grace and as many spiritual blessings as:

- a) We think we deserve
 - b) We think we need
 - c) We have earned by being good
 - d) Other people such as pastors decide to impart to us
- (See study 22 and Matthew 5:1-10 for the answer)

30. What happens if we refuse to pass on the blessings and do not treat other people well?
(see study 22)

31. Write out 1 John 1:5 below:

What is the significance of this verse? (see study 23)

32. What are the seven benefits of being clear and specific in our prayer life:(Study 24)

33. Why is God's timing important? What does it mean to wait upon the Lord? (Study 25)