

# The Transforming Power of God's Spirit



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*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

—The apostle Paul (Romans 12:2, New Revised Standard Version)

**F**ew creatures can rival the beauty of the monarch butterfly. Its stunning oranges and black are an astounding sight, a delight to the eye.

But the monarch doesn't start out that way. Before it reaches maturity it must undergo a series of remarkable transformations. Starting as a half-millimeter egg, the butterfly-to-be grows inside the egg for several days before it reaches the larval stage, when it begins a time as a bright-yellow-green striped caterpillar. In this stage it repeatedly molts, adding a new skin and shedding the old so it can continue to grow. It is then ready for the next stage of its life as a chrysalis, or pupa.

In this stage the caterpillar hangs upside down, usually from a twig or branch, and encases itself in a protective cocoon. Here, over about 10 to 14 days, it undergoes yet another amazing transformation. At the end of this stage its protective shell becomes transparent, and a majestic adult monarch butterfly emerges.

Its metamorphosis complete, the butterfly starts its new life. The new creature is vastly different from what we saw before. As it matured it changed in many ways. It transformed into something far different. Its end result is far different from its beginning.

Scripture tells us that we, too, need to undergo a *transformation*—a change, with God's help, from “the old man” to “the new man,” a human being “renewed in knowledge” and “created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24).

In this lesson we discuss this remarkable change, made possible by the transforming power of God's Spirit.

## WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The biblical account of ancient Israel describes a people abundantly familiar with God's Word—more than any other people in history. Yet, with few exceptions, the Israelites failed to steadfastly live by their Creator's instructions. Though God gave them *knowledge* of His ways, He did not, while they lived, give them the *inner strength* they needed to consistently control their fleshly nature. Yet He promised that the time would come when that spiritual power would be made available not only to them but to the people of all nations through the gift of His Spirit.

Their experience helps us understand that humans are *incomplete* without God's Spirit. As the apostle Paul explains: “. . . *No one* knows the things of God except [through] *the Spirit of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:11, emphasis added throughout). He adds, “. . . *The natural man*

does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*” (verse 14).

This *spiritual discernment* is accessible only from God as a gift through His Spirit. God makes His Spirit available to those who genuinely repent and have their old selves symbolically buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism. Jesus has promised the body of believers converted in this manner that the Holy Spirit will “guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13).

To comprehend how God's Spirit can *transform* us, we must understand what that spirit is. We begin by considering what God is. Jesus explained that “*God is Spirit*, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). *Spirit* aptly describes the very essence of God, just as *love* describes the essence of His character (1 John 4:8, 16).

An angel, informing Mary that she would give birth to Jesus as the Messiah, describes the Holy Spirit as “*the power of the Highest*” (Luke 1:35). Jesus told His apostles, “. . . You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . .” (Acts 1:8). Paul explains, “. . . God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of *power* and of *love* and of a *sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul and others performed “mighty signs and wonders, *by the power* of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:19).

The Scriptures portray the Spirit of God as *the manifestation of His divine power* within His creation, especially in His called and converted people—the saints. Through the “power of the Highest” (Luke 1:35) He can instill attributes of His divine nature and character in us. These divine, spiritual attributes *transform* our weak human nature to the extent that we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). By positive choice we then have to be willing to walk obediently in newness of life—to *use* God's Spirit to overcome our own weak, fleshly nature.

The words translated “Holy Spirit” convey the concept of power. In the original Greek the phrase for “Holy Spirit” is *hagios pneuma*, meaning literally “*holy wind*.” *Pneuma* can also mean *breath*, as in “the breath [*pneuma*] of life” (Revelation 11:11; compare Genesis 7:15). As breath is essential for physical life, so is God's Spirit essential for eternal life. And, just as wind is an invisible but powerful force in our physical environment, so the Holy Spirit is an invisible, powerful force in our spiritual development.

The *Holman Bible Dictionary* summarizes the comparison of God's Spirit to wind and breath in the Old

Testament: “In one sense the Spirit of God is depicted as a mighty wind, [with] Hebrew using the same word *ruach* for wind, breath, and spirit. During the time of the Exodus, God deployed this wind to part the sea, thus enabling the Israelites to pass through safely and elude Pharaoh and his army (Ex 14:21) . . . Of the eighty-seven times that the Spirit is described as wind, thirty-seven describe the wind as the agent of God, mostly baneful, and ever strong and intense. This property of the Spirit clearly reflects the power of God” (Multimedia Version software, “Holy Spirit”).

One of Paul’s prayers was that God would “give to [us] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge



***A new butterfly is vastly different from the creature it was before. It was transformed into something far different. Scripture tells us that we, too, need to undergo a transformation.***

of Him . . . that [we] may know what is the hope of His calling . . . and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand . . .” (Ephesians 1:17-20). God directly employed this comparison of the “the working of His mighty power” to a powerful wind when He first gave the Holy Spirit to Christ’s disciples. As Luke wrote: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a noise like a strong, blowing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something like flames of fire that were separated and stood over each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages by the power the Holy Spirit was giving them” (Acts 2:1-4, New Century Version).

After Peter preached a powerful sermon that explained why Jesus had been put to death and what the miracle of the coming of the Holy Spirit on His disciples meant, many in Peter’s audience were “cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (verses 37-39).

For the first time in history God was making His Spirit

available to all who were willing to repent of their sins by beginning to *obey* Him (Acts 5:32). “Then those people who accepted what Peter said were baptized. About *three thousand people* were added to the number of believers that day. They spent their time learning the apostles’ teaching . . .” (Acts 2:41-42, NCV). Nothing like this had ever happened! God’s transforming power was working mightily in the lives of the apostles and the others He was calling.

On an earlier occasion “Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, [which] those believing in Him would receive . . .” (John 7:37-39). Here Jesus refers not only to our receiving the Holy Spirit but to its *flowing* out from us—to produce “the *fruit* of the Spirit . . . in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Ephesians 5:9).

In a limited way the Holy Spirit, as the manifestation of God’s power, can be compared to the flow of electric power. Electricity *flows* through conductive wires from its source to the devices using it. As long as the flow of the electric current from its source is unbroken, those devices have use of its power. But any interruption of the electric current is accompanied by a loss of power to the devices using it. Constant contact with the *source* of the electric power is essential.

The same is true of God’s Spirit. We have no capacity to permanently store the power of the Holy Spirit for use when we don’t feel like serving God. If we discontinue our relationship with God, we cut ourselves off from His power working in us. Therefore our “inward man” needs to be “*renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4:16; compare Titus 3:5).

Someone might ask: How can the Holy Spirit be a gift if its effect on us depends on our maintaining a constant relationship with God?

Again, an analogy is helpful. Suppose a large electric-power company would offer free electric service to all mobile homes within a 10-mile radius of its power plant. Electric power to these homes would be a gift from the power company.

But suppose several of these homes were transported to locations beyond the limit set by the power company. Would they still be eligible for the free electric service?

No. The gift of free electric power would apply only to those living within the boundaries specified by the power company.

In like manner, our maintaining a close relationship with God is the key to our receiving spiritual power from Him. God is the *Source* of that power.

David, one of the few people mentioned in the Old Testament to receive the Holy Spirit, compared it to God’s personal “*presence*” in his life (Psalm 51:11; 139:7). Paul expressed much the same thought when he wrote: “*For it is God who [actively] works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). The Holy Spirit is the power of God actively working within His called and chosen saints, *transforming* them into His sons and daughters, enabling them to “grow up in all things

into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Jesus describes God’s Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” and “the *Helper*” that “proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26). In other words, God actively and directly empowers us through His Spirit. It is His mighty power acting within in us, assisting us in living righteously.

The Greek word translated “Helper” is *parakletos*. When translated “Helper” or “Comforter,” it refers to the Holy Spirit. However, in the one passage where it is translated “*Advocate*,” it refers to Jesus as our Advocate with the Father. The verb form of this word is *parakaleo*, translated in the King James Version of the New Testament in various ways such as “beseech,” “comfort,” “desire,” “exhort,” “intreat” and “pray.” A third form of the word, *paraklesis*, is a noun translated “consolation,” “exhortation,” “comfort” and “intreaty.”

*Parakletos* means literally one “called to one’s side” or “to one’s aid” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Comfort, Comforter, Comfortless”). In the Greek usage of the time it was often used to refer to a legal counsel who pleaded one’s case before a court. All three of these Greek words are derived from Greek root words meaning “to call to one’s side”—implying a call for help.

From these meanings we can see that *parakletos*, when used to describe God’s Spirit as our Helper, implies a *source of help* that is available to us in times of need or trouble—conveying to us God’s guidance and assistance much like an attorney, a “counsel for the defense,” might if we were on trial in a court of law.

Paul illustrated this in 2 Corinthians 1. But the full impact of Paul’s description of the Holy Spirit as our Helper is lost in most English translations. This is because the Greek words *parakletos*, *paraklesis* and *parakaleo* are difficult to translate into the appropriate forms of a single English word. The English words most commonly used by translators—*comfort* and *consolation*—do not adequately express the meaning reflected by the Greek words.

To remedy this translation deficiency in the following quote, we have substituted, in brackets, appropriate forms of the word *help*, or phrases containing the word *help*, for the words *comfort* and *consolation* that were used by the translators. This better conveys the force of Paul’s intent.

Paul wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all [*divine spiritual help*], who [*helps*] us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to [*help*] those who are in any trouble, with the [*spiritual help*] with which we ourselves are [*helped*] by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our [*spiritual help*] also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your [*spiritual help*] and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are [*spiritually helped*], it is for your [*spiritual help*] and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the [*divine spiritual help*]” (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

Paul wanted the Corinthians never to forget they could access and rely on powerful assistance from the Creator of the universe. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never

leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

God goes beyond just *assisting* those who serve Him. He *inspires* and *leads* them through His Spirit. Paul wrote, “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). And Peter explained that “holy men of God spoke as they were *moved* by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Let’s examine how God has led and inspired His servants through the ages.

## GOD’S SPIRIT BEFORE THE CHURCH ERA

### When is God’s Spirit first mentioned in the Bible?

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2, New International Version).*

In its first chapter the Bible introduces us to powerful effects of God’s Spirit. The subsequent verses then describe God, with the power of His Spirit, fashioning the heavens and earth and all that is in them. “By His Spirit He adorned the heavens . . .” (Job 26:13).

God then made mankind “in His own image” (Genesis 1:26-28). He placed the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, where they could have eaten of the tree of life (Genesis 2:9).

Christ taught that “life”—eternal life—is available only through God’s Spirit (John 6:63). Paul explained that, “if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give *life* to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [which] dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). Therefore the tree of life represents the *life-giving power* of God’s Spirit.

Adam and Eve, of course, had the opportunity to make another choice. And, to their detriment, they chose the other tree. As a result of Satan’s persuasion, they chose the fruit of the tree that represented only *knowledge* of right and wrong—“the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil”—rather than the power to subdue and control human nature as represented by the fruit of the tree of life (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6). Tragically, they did not understand that *knowledge alone*—especially knowledge acquired primarily through human experience—is not enough.

So with Adam and Eve the history of human beings began *without the active presence of God* in their lives; they lacked the power and help of His Spirit.

### By the time of Noah how had Adam’s and Eve’s choice affected their descendants?

*“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Genesis 6:11-12).*

Human beings without God’s Spirit cannot control their own fleshly nature. Such control requires more than

knowledge alone. It requires help from God through His Spirit. But not until Jesus had died to pay for humanity's sins would God again begin offering His Spirit to all who would come to Him in a spirit of repentance.

### **How did God usually communicate with mankind after Satan deceived Adam and Eve?**

*“. . . Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21, New American Standard Version).*

Though humanity as a whole had no access to the Holy Spirit, God did give His Spirit to certain chosen servants who spoke for Him. God also inspired His messages through them to be recorded for us today in the pages of the Bible.

### **Did mankind listen to these prophetic messengers inspired by God's Spirit?**

*“Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the LORD; and they testified against them, but they would not listen” (2 Chronicles 24:19; compare Genesis 6:5; Nehemiah 9:26).*

Then, as today, most people ignored the warnings of God's messengers. Similarly, most people today choose to ignore those same warnings written in Scripture. Human attitudes toward God's Word haven't changed.

### **What was God's conclusion concerning humanity as He began to use Noah?**

*“Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years’” (Genesis 6:3, NIV).*

Resistance to anything He tried to teach humans was so intense by the time of Noah that God decided to give humanity only 120 more years before He would destroy all but Noah's family. That destruction came through what has come to be known as Noah's Flood.

After the Flood God called and used Abraham. In the succeeding years He used Abraham's son, grandson and great-grandson. Then, generations later, He began working with the nation of Israel, which He began through some of Abraham's descendants.

### **Did God communicate with Israel through His Spirit in His prophets?**

*“You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct [the people of Israel], and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing . . .” (Nehemiah 9:20-21; compare verse 30).*

So overwhelming was the task of trying to lead the people of Israel that Moses, even though he was the only man at that time who had the Holy Spirit, complained to God, “I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me” (Numbers 11:14).

“So the LORD said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them

to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. *I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone”* (verses 16-17).

This is the largest group of people mentioned in the Old Testament to receive God's Spirit at the same time. God gave the chief leaders in Israel some of the same spiritual help and the divine power He had given Moses so they could help guide the new nation. This occurred during the 40 years of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness, before they entered the Promised Land.

### **After the days of Moses, did God continue giving His Spirit to leaders and prophets in Israel?**

*“The Spirit of the LORD came upon [Joshua], and he judged Israel” (Judges 3:10).*

As time went on, God gave His Spirit to other leaders of Israel. Among them were Gideon, Jephthah, Saul and David (Judges 6:34; 11:29; 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:13-14). But, apart from a few exceptions, the people never returned to God with all their hearts. Ultimately their rebellion against Him and rejection of His ways were so great that most of them were taken into captivity at the hands of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

### **Does God explain why He finally sent all of the tribes of Israel into captivity?**

*“But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus . . . I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known” (Zechariah 7:11-14).*

After the Israelites demonstrated by their long history of disobedience that the guidance from leaders and prophets filled with God's Spirit would not change their hearts, God began revealing His plans for the then-distant future.

## **GOD'S PROMISE OF A NEW ERA**

### **Did God promise a Spirit-filled descendant of David would lead and judge His people?**

*“A shoot [Christ] will come up from the stump of Jesse [father of King David]; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth . . . Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isaiah 11:1-5, NIV).*

## How does God propose to change the human heart?

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then . . . you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:26-28; compare Isaiah 59:20-21).*

God’s Spirit is not a substitute for the knowledge of right and wrong that comes from God’s commandments and laws. Rather, through His Spirit God supplies the power we need to obey His Word and do His will.

## Has God promised to make His Spirit available to everyone?

*“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh . . .” (Joel 2:28).*

God has a long-range plan for changing human nature and reopening the door for all of humanity to receive His Spirit. The door was closed when Adam and Eve rejected Him and chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That door is the key to that change. It is also the key to a new relationship people can have with God—by repenting and accepting the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, for the forgiveness of sin.

## Is God committed to bringing these universal changes to pass?

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).*

God has committed Himself to make His Spirit available to all the tribes of Israel—to a future restored nation of all the descendants of Abraham through His grandson Jacob. At that time He will use their example to teach all other nations how to repent so they also can receive the Holy Spirit.

“So this is what the Lord GOD says: Now I will bring the people of Jacob back from captivity, and I will have mercy on the whole nation of Israel. I will not let them dishonor me. The people will forget their shame and how they rejected me when they live again in safety on their own land with no one to make them afraid. I will bring the people back from other lands and gather them from the lands of their enemies.

“So I will use my people to show many nations that I am holy. Then my people will know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into captivity among the nations, but then I brought them back to their own land,

leaving no one behind. I will not turn away from them anymore, because I will put my Spirit into the people of Israel, says the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 39:25-29, NCV).

## How will the new Israel, a people led by God’s Spirit, influence other nations?

*“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).*

As the fruits of God’s Spirit—such as harmony, cooperation and concern for others—multiply within the newly reconstituted Israel, other nations will see these results and want to share them. They will come to Jerusalem seeking guidance. “In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zechariah 8:23). This, of course, will occur only after Jesus’ second coming.

## What had to precede God’s making His Spirit available to all human beings?

*“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious . . . You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God . . .” (1 Peter 2:6-10).*

God first had to send Jesus as His Son, as a human being, to become mankind’s Redeemer and Savior. Jesus had to die to make possible the forgiveness of sin so the Holy Spirit could go to all who would repent. Then He had to establish His Church (Matthew 16:18) so He would have a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) trained and ready to assist Him in teaching God’s ways to man when He returns to establish His Kingdom. That is why God is now, through the power of His Spirit, converting and training “His own special people” as members of the Church Jesus established.

## Was Jesus’ birth related to God’s plans for Jacob’s descendants that has not yet come to pass?

*“The angel said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid, Mary; God has shown you his grace. Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end’” (Luke 1:30-33, NCV).*

## Did the Holy Spirit have a powerful role in Jesus’ birth and mission?

*“The angel said to Mary, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. For this reason the baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35, NCV).*

*“The One whom God sent speaks the words of God, because God gives him the Spirit fully. The Father loves the Son and has given him power over everything” (John 3:34-35, NCV).*

The four accounts of Jesus’ life and work—the four Gospels—attribute His divine powers to the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, when He was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1) and had successfully resisted the temptations (verses 3-11), “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah” (Luke 4:14-17).

### **Did Jesus apply Isaiah’s prophecies to His mission?**

*“And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:17-21; compare Isaiah 61:1-2).*

Jesus announced the beginning of His ministry as a physical human being at the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth on a Sabbath day. He did this by reading a prophecy pertaining to the Messiah from Isaiah 61:1-2. He then confirmed that He was the One of whom Isaiah had prophesied. He confirmed that He had been *anointed* by God as the Messiah *with the Holy Spirit* and that this Spirit was *empowering* him to begin His ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

Jesus, however, read only the portion of Isaiah’s prophecy that applied to His *first* coming. The same prophecy also describes what He will do when He returns: “He has sent me to comfort all those who are sad and to help the sorrowing people of Jerusalem. I will give them a crown to replace their ashes, and the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow, and clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness. Then they will be called Trees of Goodness, trees planted by the LORD to show his greatness. They will rebuild the old ruins . . .” (verses 3-4, NCV).

What God began at that time in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is only the *beginning* of what He will accomplish through His Spirit. In the book of Revelation Jesus is quoted as saying, “I, Jesus, have

sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16). John, the writer of Revelation, continues: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (verse 17).

This message, from the last chapter of the Bible, invites everyone to partake of God’s Spirit and enjoy its fruit. Only its fruit can satisfy the spiritual thirst and longings of all human beings. The work of preparing mankind to receive God’s Spirit began at Jesus’ *first coming*.

Let’s see how God is using His Spirit to prepare the few He is calling to be the *light of the world* now and in the future—*kings and priests* assisting Jesus in converting the whole world.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH**

### **How vital is the Holy Spirit to our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ?**

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by [which] we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:14-17).*

Only those who have God the Father and Jesus the Son dwelling in them through the power of the Holy Spirit are considered “children of God.”

Notice that God *leads* His children with His Spirit. He does not *drive* them. God’s Spirit empowers only those who *choose* to serve Him. That explains why Paul wrote: “Therefore *do not let* sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:12-13).

Paul is telling us that God, through His Spirit, will *help* us live righteously. If we respond He will instill more and more of His divine nature and character in us. But He *will not force us*. We must trust Him to help us so we can *act in faith*. As we need more faith, He will provide it (Ephesians 2:8; compare Psalm 1:1-3).

### **Is it possible to be a true Christian without the Holy Spirit?**

*“So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His*

*Spirit [which] dwells in you” (Romans 8:8-11).*

Anyone who claims to be a *converted* follower of Christ who has not truly repented and received the indwelling power of God through the Holy Spirit is sorely mistaken about his status in God’s sight. Such a person’s outlook on life is still being shaped mostly by his fleshly feelings, desires and impulses because “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another . . .” (Galatians 5:17).

Notice that Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit proceeding from both the Father and Jesus. The Scriptures represent the Spirit’s divine power as available to us from either of Them. But it is represented as the same Spirit—with no distinction. As Paul explains: “There is . . . *one Spirit*, just as you were called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4).

### **Why, in addition to spiritual strength, do we need the Holy Spirit?**

*“Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we can know all that God has given us. And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom but with words taught us by the Spirit. And so we explain spiritual truths to spiritual people” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13, NCV).*

Jesus told His disciples, “. . . It has been *given to you to know* the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [who are not disciples] it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). Without God’s Spirit no one can fully comprehend

the Holy Scriptures. God’s help, through His Spirit, is essential for us to attain that level of understanding.

### **Should we ask God to guide us, through His Spirit, to rightly understand the Scriptures?**

*“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).*

*“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things . . .” (John 14:26).*

*“However, when [it], the Spirit of truth, has come, [it] will guide you into all truth . . .” (John 16:13).*

From the above scriptures it is clear that God does the guiding, and He does it through His Spirit.

### **Does God expect us to spiritually mature and grow?**

*“We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15, NRSV).*

*“You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18, NRSV).*

## **The Letter and Spirit of the Law**

**T**he teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are revolutionary—not because He *annulled* the laws God revealed, but because He *expanded* them, showing their spiritual intent.

Notice, in His familiar words in the Sermon on the Mount, His teaching about the commandments of God: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus spoke plainly. God’s law is not abolished, and, according to Christ’s own words, anyone who teaches otherwise directly contradicts Him and is in serious trouble (verses 18-19).

Some people assume and teach that we do not need to keep God’s law because Jesus “fulfilled” it. But they fundamentally misunderstand Christ’s clear words. The word translated *fulfill* in this passage means “to make full, to fill to the full” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Fill”). The same word is used of filling up nets with fish (Matthew 13:48). In the same way that a fisherman fills his nets with fish, Jesus perfectly “filled up” the law of God. He perfectly kept the Ten Commandments, including the *spiritual intent* of God’s laws and how we should apply them.

How did Jesus expand on the law, showing its fuller and deeper spiritual intent? Notice one example in Matthew 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already

committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The immoral act of committing adultery is defined as a sin by the Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14). Yet the *literal wording* of that commandment—the *letter* of that law (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)—does not fully reflect God’s *intent*. Jesus showed that the spirit of the law—its spiritual intent—is much broader than the letter and encompasses even our *thoughts* toward others. Lustful thoughts, He taught, are mental, emotional and spiritual adultery and are contrary to a basic principle of His will—loving our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

Similarly, Christ expanded the intent of the Sixth Commandment, which prohibits murder (Exodus 20:13). “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21-22, New Revised Standard Version). Jesus explained that uncontrolled or unjustified anger can break the spirit of the Sixth Commandment.

He continued: “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all . . . But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For what-

“. . . As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

When we receive God’s Spirit we are no more than spiritual infants. But we should begin growing by quickly learning the basics of God’s way of life, by thriving on the milk of the Word. If we do, God will work in us, though the Holy Spirit, to *transform* our lives.

### Is effort on our part necessary?

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1-5).

God expects us to *study* the Holy Scriptures so we will correctly *understand* them. He wants us to learn how to *effectively apply* His Word in our in daily lives. The Scriptures tell us that “solid food belongs to those *who are of full age*, that is, those who *by reason of use* have

their senses exercised to *discern* both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

In contrast, those who neglect spiritual growth are told: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the *first principles* of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is *unskilled* in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe” (verses 12-13). As our knowledge of God’s Word increases, our *skill in discerning* the proper application of its spiritual principles should also greatly increase.

Notice Paul’s prayer for God’s converted children: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be *strengthened* with might *through His Spirit in the inner man*, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, *may be able to comprehend* with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be *filled with all the fullness of God*” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Paul prayed that God would help His children to discern His will, to *comprehend* the *intent* of His Word. Through His Spirit God helps us incorporate this understanding into *our character*—patterning it after His character, His *divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4). With our cooperation, He writes the principles embodied in His laws in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10).

The marvelous process of developing character is a

ever is more than these is from the evil one” (verses 33-37).

Jesus’ teaching about oaths illustrates another aspect of applying the spirit of the law rather than just the letter of such biblical commands. In this example the *spiritual principle* underlying the law demands that those who serve God should be truthful in everything they say. They should not have to be required to swear an oath before their words can be regarded as honest and factual. Therefore the commandment telling us not to “bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16) should mean far more to us than only being required to tell the truth if we are under an oath. Jesus made the New Testament application of this command even more demanding by saying, “Do not swear at all.”

With the help of His Spirit, God enables us to discern that the *intent* of a law may extend far beyond the letter—the exact wording—originally written in the five books of the law, the first five books of the Bible. God expects us to look at specific problems that the written laws address and discern how we should apply the intended principles of those laws in reference to the *spirit* or intent of all of God’s Word as magnified by Christ and His apostles.

This requires a wisdom and spiritual balance that we can attain only if we are guided by God’s Spirit. Those who do not have the Spirit of God simply do not have this discernment. Rather, they naturally tend to be “hostile” to God’s laws (Romans 8:7, NIV) and perceive them as “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 2:14). They do not see them as the wisdom of God that needs to be properly discerned and

“correctly handled” (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV).

God will help us, through His Spirit, to begin to discern how to apply the principles contained in the Scriptures in this manner—to discern and *comprehend* the proper application of those Scriptures. This means that the standards for our conduct will be even higher than those expressed in the literal words—in the letter of the laws—recorded for us in the Old Testament.

Jesus illustrates this with two other examples. First, He explains: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees [who prided themselves in obeying the letter of the law] you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20; compare Luke 18:11).

He also taught: “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:10). Our righteousness has to exceed the letter of the law. We become profitable servants of God only if we begin to discern and apply to the way we obey Him the *primary principles* (such as faith, hope, love, justice, good judgment and mercy) on which all of the Word of God is based.

God gives us His Spirit so we can properly discern and apply the *spirit* and *intent* of the Holy Scriptures. (To better understand the spiritual foundation and intent of God’s laws, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

*miracle*. We could never accomplish it by ourselves. That is why Paul wrote: “For by grace [God’s loving gift] you have been saved through faith, *and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*, not of works, lest anyone should boast. *For we are His workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

No amount of effort on our part, unless it is accompanied by the power of God’s Spirit, would ever shape us into what God wants us to be. But with His Spirit working in us we become *His workmanship*—enabled to perform *works* truly pleasing to Him. We can comprehend what those righteous works are because God helps us, through the power of His Spirit, to discern how to observe the spirit (the intent) of “every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

### **How does the Bible define the “good works” we should “walk in”?**

*“But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:35).*

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13).*

*“[Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).*

*“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Titus 1:16).*

A “lawless deed” cannot qualify as a “good work.” Rather, one who “works righteousness” is also known by his “good conduct.” Jesus stressed this truth when He said, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:23).

In contrast, through the power of the Holy Spirit God writes His laws *in our hearts and minds*, enabling us to obey the Scriptures (Hebrews 10:15-16; Ezekiel 36:26-27). As Peter wrote: “Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:14-15, NRSV).

Righteous works are simply the application of the *principles* found in God’s Word—performed through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as Jesus reminds us: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). We can consistently do this, however, only if God works in us through His Spirit.

## **A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST**

### **How does Paul describe those who, after baptism, are transformed by the Holy Spirit?**

*“... You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed*

*in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:9-10).*

*“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27).*

*“... God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).*

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).*

When our minds and hearts are *transformed* by the Holy Spirit, we “put on Christ.” Paul describes this dramatic change in our hearts and minds as Jesus Christ living within us. We “put off the old man with his deeds” and “put on the new man.” We are “renewed” in *knowledge* and in the *spirit* of our minds. As the *children of God* we become “in Christ” a truly *new creation*. God transforms us into His own family—His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18).

### **What responsibility does this place on those who are being transformed?**

*“You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24, NRSV).*

*“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:12-14).*

God is able and determined to create in us His *own divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4). “For He made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the *righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The first two chapters of Genesis briefly tell how God created the physical universe and emphasize that He made the first man and woman. But now He works on a far more important creation—the creation of *righteous character* in His sons and daughters. That is why our genuine, heartfelt repentance is so important as He begins this process in us. We have to want, with all of our heart, for Him to make us into a *new person*.

Why is our participation so important?

The creation of righteous character is a two-way process. God gives us the knowledge and all the power

we need. But we supply the *choice* to live righteously. Without our choice, freely made, we would be mere automatons—functioning like a sophisticated pre-programmed robot. That is not what God desires.

God wants us to be His own children who share His values. He wants us to use His values and convictions to make decisions as He would make them. Why? Because He wants us to “inherit all things”—to share His entire creation with Him. As He tells us in Revelation 21:7, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

Notice Paul’s exuberance over the inheritance God has in store for us: “The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:16-18).

Nothing is more important to God than our spiritual development. Our development is essential for us to receive the awesome inheritance God has in store for us as His children: “But one testified in a certain place, saying: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put *all things* in subjection under his feet.’ For in that He put all in subjection under him, *He left nothing that is not put under him*. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor . . .” (Hebrews 2:6-9).

### **Was Jesus what God wants us to become like as human beings?**

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:28-29).*

God predetermined, in His master plan, that His Son should be the *model* for our development. Or, as Paul explained, God “called us with a holy calling . . . which was given to us in Christ Jesus *before time began* . . .” (2 Timothy 1:9).

If we are “in Christ,” we are being “conformed” to His “image”—just as “He is *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*” (Colossians 1:15). Our spiritual growth should continue “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:13, NRSV). Therefore, “as we have borne *the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

### **Can we ultimately be like the glorified Christ?**

*“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has*

*not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him . . .” (1 John 3:2).*

### **How should the knowledge of our incredible potential motivate us?**

*“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).*

Knowing God’s eternal plan for us should inspire us to purify our hearts and motives. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” said Jesus (Matthew 5:8), and James wrote, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

### **Whose heart and thoughts should we emulate?**

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).*

Paul had just described key characteristics of Christ’s mind, His attitude toward others. Paul first emphasized that “in Christ” our “fellowship of the Spirit” should motivate us to share the “same love” for one another. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (verses 1-2).

Then Paul explained the proper motivation for all our relationships. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (verses 3-4). We need to *think* with the same love and humility that was *in Jesus’ mind*.

## **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

### **Can we habitually mix righteousness with unrighteousness and please God?**

*“Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19).*

*“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).*

The Scriptures reveal that God’s children occasionally sin after baptism (1 John 1:8). But, if they wish to continue in His favor, they must not only confess to Him but also ask Him to “cleanse [them] from all unrighteousness” (verse 9). They cannot please God if they *deliberately practice sinning*.

However, some habits deeply ingrained from early childhood may not be that easily overcome. Victims of continual abuse during adolescence are a case in point. The effects of such sins tend to foster serious weaknesses in victims of abuse. It may take a long period of diligent striving to finally overcome. Paul put our task this way:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (Colossians 3:5, NIV). We can accomplish this only through the power of God’s Spirit.

James puts God’s requirements in perspective: “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh. Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing” (James 3:11-16, NASB).

### How does Christ distinguish His true servants from those who are still of this world?

*“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:16-17;*

*compare Philippians 1:9-11).*

### What fruit should God’s Spirit produce in us?

*“... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).*

Each aspect of the “fruit” listed here is simply a reflection of God’s character reproduced in us by His Spirit.

### How important is love, as an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, to our spiritual growth?

*“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).*

*“... The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit...” (Romans 5:5).*

God is love (1 John 4:8). Love is the foundation of His character. Paul describes ways that God’s love in us should transform our character: “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not

## How to Stir Up the Spirit

The apostle Paul admonished members of one of the churches he started: “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). He urged the young evangelist Timothy: “. . . Stir up [rekindle] the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Paul likened God’s Spirit to an ember in a dying fire. He encouraged Timothy to stir up the live coal, to fan it into flames. He knew we must guard against neglecting the gift of God’s Spirit, of letting the fire grow cold.

How can we maintain the courage, strength and love God gives us through His Spirit? What could possibly cause us to quench—to stifle—our first love and enthusiasm for drawing close to God and allowing Him to actively change our lives? We find the answers in several scriptures.

Paul tells us: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Satan will do all in his power to discourage us, to induce us to become disillusioned and afraid, to abandon our confidence in God. What, then, did Paul mean by putting on “the whole armor of God” as our defense? What may we use to resist such self-defeating attitudes as fear, apathy and discouragement?

Paul continues: “Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these,

take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of [the hope of] salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (verses 14-17, NRSV).

Paul tells us we need to stand fast in the truth we have learned, concentrating on living righteously regardless of circumstances. We also must do our part in furthering the spread of the true gospel, never losing sight of eternal life as our goal and using God’s Word as the sword that cuts through all deception.

But equally important is what Paul mentions next: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (verses 18-20, NIV).

Our ability to remain spiritually strong and active depends on how much we rely on God. Our line of communication for that help is through prayer.

Paul and his helpers prayed not only for their own needs but also for God to strengthen others who were being converted through their work. “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

He also encouraged them to make it their practice to pray not only for themselves but for him and other laborers in the faith: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery

provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails . . ." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NASB). Every other aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is merely a specific expression of godly love.

### Is loving those who love us sufficient to please God?

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:43-45).*

By explaining that we should love not only our friends and family but even those who do not love us, Jesus again stresses our need for the extra help of God's Spirit. We naturally tend to dislike anyone who dislikes us. But that approach simply returns evil for evil. Instead, we should "not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

The Scriptures teach that love is a debt we will always owe: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except *the continuing debt to love one another*; for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Romans 13:8-9, NIV). Love is the basis of all of God's commandments (Matthew 22:35-40). (For a detailed explanation of *how* God's law is a law of love request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

### What are some important ways we should express the spiritual fruit of joy?

*"But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You. For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield" (Psalm 5:11-12).*

*"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting*

of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:2-4).

He especially wanted them to pray for the success of his work of spreading the gospel and his service to God's Church. "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and *through the love of the Spirit*, that you *strive together with me in prayers to God* for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and *that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints*" (Romans 15:30-31).

A key to keeping the working of God's Spirit active and stirred up in our lives is keeping our minds on the big picture of what God is doing. If we dwell excessively on ourselves and our problems, we become more vulnerable to Satan's negative influences. Paul urged new converts to see themselves as *part of a great work God is doing*. As the point man for the preaching of the gospel in their region of the world, he encouraged them to enthusiastically support his efforts through their prayers.

He explained why their prayers were so important: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened *that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead*.

"He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as *you help us by your prayers*. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many" (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, NIV).

Paul mentions his great concern for those converted under his ministry. "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, *being confident of this*, that he who began a good work in you *will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6, NIV).

It is important to keep our confidence in God alive and active. Sometimes we need to combine *fasting* with our prayers to stir up our zeal and renew our dedication and commitment to Him. King David wrote that he "humbled [him]self with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Fasting is abstaining from food and drink for a brief period as a means of getting our minds back on the reality that we are not self-sufficient. Fasting helps us realize how fragile we are and how much we depend on things beyond ourselves—things that we often take for granted, such as food and drink.

The Bible records that great men of faith such as Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul and Jesus Himself fasted to draw closer to God (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Daniel 9:3; 10:2-3; 2 Corinthians 11:27; Matthew 4:2).

Someone asked Jesus the question, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" He responded: "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. *But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days*" (Mark 2:18-20).

Jesus knew that His true disciples, once He was no longer with them in the flesh, would need at times to fast to regain their zeal to serve Him. They would need to stir up the gift of the Holy Spirit within them.

Jesus also explained the correct approach we should take in fasting: "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

James tells us, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). Through constant prayer and occasional fasting we can do this. We can make it our practice to *stir up and rekindle* the Spirit of God within us.

*before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, NRSV).*

*“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy” (Philippians 1:3-4).*

We can especially rejoice knowing that God is always there to help us individually—just as He will help our spiritual brethren scattered throughout the world.

Peter encourages us to rejoice that we can honor God by setting a good example even when we are mistreated through our service to Him. “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13, NIV).

### **Is seeking peace with others a significant fruit of God’s Spirit?**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

*“As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:15).*

*“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:17-18, NASB).*

### **Why is patience a part of the fruit of the Spirit?**

*“But God made a promise to us, and we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth where goodness lives. Dear friends, since you are waiting for this to happen, do your best to be without sin and without fault . . . Remember that we are saved because our Lord is patient” (2 Peter 3:13-15, NCV).*

God has not revealed when the end of this age and Jesus’ return will occur (Acts 1:6-7). But His Word counsels us: “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, *be patient* and stand firm . . .” (James 5:7-8, NIV).

God has an excellent reason for wanting us to have patience. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). In His master plan of salvation God intends to provide an opportunity for everyone who has ever lived to understand His Word and repent.

Therefore He wants us to *wait patiently* for Him to act on His own timetable. “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and *may you be prepared to endure everything with patience*, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints

in the light” (Colossians 1:11-12, NRSV).

In regard to our relationships with one another we are also admonished: “Be completely humble and gentle; *be patient, bearing with one another in love*. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3, NIV).

James expresses the same thought: “My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience” (James 1:2-3, NCV).

### **Should kindness be part of our character?**

*“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).*

*“. . . You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness . . .” (Nehemiah 9:17; compare Joel 2:13).*

*“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).*

### **Is goodness another godly trait we should emulate?**

*“. . . The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Psalm 33:5).*

*“Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8).*

*“Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You . . .” (Psalm 31:19).*

*“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness . . .” (2 Peter 1:5, NIV).*

### **Why are faith and faithfulness essential fruits of God’s Spirit?**

*“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” (Luke 16:10-12).*

*“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities’” (Luke 19:17).*

As Jesus establishes His Kingdom after His return, the Scriptures reveal that “those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). To participate with Christ in His future Kingdom we must ask God to strengthen us through the power of His Spirit that we may faithfully carry out our obligation to be righteous toward both God and our fellowman.

Another important aspect of faithfulness is simply having faith in God—implicitly *trusting* Him. “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” (Hebrews 11:6). Also: “For by grace you have been saved *through faith*, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). (To better understand the meaning of faith as discussed in the Bible, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*.)

### **Is gentleness part of the fruit of the Spirit?**

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart . . .” (Matthew 11:29).*

*“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all . . .” (2 Timothy 2:24).*

Jesus and Paul both emphasized that we will have a right spirit toward others only if we approach them in a gentle, considerate spirit. Paul reminded the Thessalonians: “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). God does not want us to treat our fellow human beings harshly. That is not His character. God’s nature is to be merciful, kind and gentle.

Peter encourages women not to emphasize their clothing, their outward appearance, but to develop “the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a *gentle and quiet spirit*, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4). James tells us that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, *gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy* and good fruits” (James 3:17). We must learn to express a genuine love for others in a kind and gentle manner.

### **How crucial is self-control as a fruit of God’s Spirit?**

*“And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’” (Acts 24:24-25).*

Paul mentions *self-control*, the final in the list of attributes he calls the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23, as one of the three most significant features of his “faith in Christ” as he explained it to the Roman governor of Judea. He ranks it in importance with *righteousness* and *the judgment to come*. Why is this character trait so important?

One reason we need the Holy Spirit is to help us *control* our human nature. In addition to transforming our thinking and perspective, God’s Spirit empowers us to exercise self-control, to live by the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

### **Why do we need more than knowledge alone to subdue and control our human nature?**

*“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in*

*the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).*

*“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Romans 7:14-17).*

Paul tells us that having an understanding of what is sin, which must be defined by God’s law, is not enough to overpower and control the pulls and deceit of our human nature. Simply knowing God’s law does not solve our problem. God’s law gives us “the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). Such knowledge is essential to our spiritual growth. And Paul confirms—contrary to the view commonly attributed to him—that we must practice “the righteous requirement of the law” (Romans 8:4).

But that is not his main point in these verses. Rather, because of the weakness of our flesh, Paul stresses that we cannot achieve true righteousness by ourselves, by our own efforts. Only by changing our sinful nature to God’s divine nature can we overcome sin. We need our Redeemer—Jesus, the Messiah and our Savior—living in us (Galatians 2:20) to deliver us from ourselves and make us righteous. Only in this way can we produce the fruit of the Spirit in abundance.

The *fruit* of the Spirit reflects the goodness, faithfulness and self-restraint inherent in God’s nature. If His Spirit is in us, these traits that are the Spirit’s fruit should also become fundamental characteristics of our nature—that is, as long as we remain “in Christ” and continue serving God from the heart.

### **How does Peter summarize these spiritual essentials?**

*“. . . Do your best to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God; and to your service for God, add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness, add love. If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you to be useful and productive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But anyone who does not have these things cannot see clearly. He is blind and has forgotten that he was made clean from his past sins. My brothers and sisters, try hard to be certain that you really are called and chosen by God. If you do all these things, you will never fall. And you will be given a very great welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-11, NCV).*

Peter here stresses how important our spiritual growth is to our maintaining an obedient relationship with Christ now and to our inheriting eternal life in the future.

## OUR FINAL TRANSFORMATION

If we have God's Spirit, what is our destiny when Jesus returns?

*"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).*

Be sure to read Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 of our final transformation from our "lowly" physical, mortal bodies to glorious, immortal spirit bodies. The apostle Peter summarizes the transformation that God accomplishes in His saints in these words: "His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4, NRSV).

### WHAT NEXT?

In lesson 10 we learn how those who receive the Holy Spirit are members of the Body of Christ, the Church. We will study the scriptures that define the biblical *Church of God* and examine its purpose and mission.

In the meantime, to better understand this lesson, we recommend you read the following free booklets:

- *You Can Have Living Faith.*
- *The Ten Commandments.*
- *What Is Your Destiny?*
- *The Road to Eternal Life.*
- *The Gospel of the Kingdom.*
- *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.*

For your free copies, please contact our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed below.

## Points to Ponder

These questions are intended as a study aid, to spur further thought on the concepts discussed in this lesson and to help you apply them on a personal level. We suggest you take the time to write out your answers to these questions and compare them to the scriptures given. Please feel free to write us with any comments or suggestions, including questions about the course or this lesson.

- What are some ways the Bible describes the Holy Spirit? (2 Timothy 1:7; Acts 2:1-4; John 7:37-39; 15:26).
- Did God inspire His prophets and other servants of the Old Testament with His Spirit? (Nehemiah 9:20; 2 Peter 1:20-21). But did the people listen? (Nehemiah 9:30; Zechariah 7:11-12).
- How does God propose to change the human heart? (Ezekiel 36:26-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- How vital is the Holy Spirit to our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ? (Romans 8:8-11, 14-17; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14).
- Should we ask God to guide us, through His Spirit, to rightly understand the Scriptures? (Luke 11:13; John 14:26; 16:13).
- How does the Holy Spirit make us a new creation, and what responsibility does that put on those who are being transformed? (Colossians 1:27; 3:9-10, 12-14; Galatians 2:20; 3:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24).
- Whose heart and thoughts should we copy? (Philippians 2:5).
- What fruit should God's Spirit be producing in us? (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Psalm 5:11-12; Matthew 5:9; James 5:7-8; Romans 12:10; Psalm 33:5; Luke 16:10-12; 2 Timothy 2:24; Acts 24:24-25).
- Does God give special gifts to those in His Church through His Spirit? (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 13:13).

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Author: Roger Foster Editorial reviewers: Scott Ashley, John Bald, Peter Eddington, Bruce Gore, Roy Holladay, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Burk McNair, Darris McNeely, David Register, John Ross Schroeder, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Robin Webber, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson Design: Shaun Venish

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P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205

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**Zambia and Malawi:** United Church of God

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Phone: 09 263 20 68102 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

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Phone and fax: +63 82 241-0150;

Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444

Web site address: www.ucg.org.ph

**Tonga:** United Church of God—Tonga

P.O. Box 127, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

##### ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027

Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795

E-mail: info@ucg.org