

Life in the Spirit

Writings of Dr E.G. Gibson

edited and presented
as a series of readings

Jennifer Turner

Mark Ingram

Ted Gibson, or “Doc Gibson” as he was affectionately called by his students, influenced many lives in the nearly 50 years of his Australia-wide ministry as pastor, preacher, and theological college principal in four states. His influence continues on, not least in the two of us – his daughter and a former student. As Mark has collected his writings, audio recordings and lecture notes, we have heard again in them the Doc’s profound love for Christ and his emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the believer’s life and we have both moved to a deeper faith and walk with God.

Many of the themes of contemporary Christianity are found in Ted’s teaching. His focus on relationships between Christians through the “one anothers” of the New Testament, his concern for the formation (“sanctification”) of believers through the spiritual disciplines, a practical theology of everyday life, and especially, his instruction on the work of the Holy Spirit, are just some of the topics that have found new currency in recent days. So we bring these through this series to a new audience but we also know that there are many in Australia who will welcome reading them again, and be encouraged in their *Life in the Spirit*.

Perth, 2009

Edward Gordon Gibson (1915–1991) was born in Sydney but lived most of his ministry life in Western Australia and Queensland, with stops along the way in NSW and South Australia. He was also president of Australian Baptists for four years, the period in which the articles in this booklet were written. Ted pioneered advanced theological education in a time when it was not common among evangelicals and encouraged his students as well as his family to follow in his example, believing that all truth is God’s truth and the gift of God-given ability should be honoured through its rigorous development. He will be remembered most however, for the twinkle in his eye and the aptness of his everyday illustrations as he brought the Scriptures which he loved, to life for one and all.

PREFACE

For those who knew Ted Gibson and sat under his ministry, the following Bible studies, first published in *The Australian Baptist* in 1984, will be redolent of his character and style as a preacher and teacher.

He himself would be the first to acknowledge the influence of his Principal, the Rev George Morling, who lived and taught the meaning of “life in the Spirit”. From his earliest days as a young theological graduate of the Baptist Theological College of NSW (now Morling College), Ted Gibson felt the call to preach. Although he had degrees in Anthropology and Science as well as Theology, his great love was focused in the Scriptures. In the following brief popular studies, he quotes or refers to at least 30 of the 66 books of the Bible, including nine from the Old Testament.

The topic of the series is explicit in the title: *Life in the Spirit*, but in every study the focus is upon Jesus Christ. This is entirely appropriate since Christ Himself said in John 16:13ff: “When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . . He will glorify me.” These studies illustrate the truth that a rich full-orbed doctrine of the Holy Spirit will inevitably glorify Christ.

Rev Dr G. Noel Vose AM

Principal Emeritus, Vose Theological College, Western Australia

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All Scripture passages are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated. Dr Gibson often used his own choice of words in translating a Scripture in his teaching, and where this occurs in the text we have left it as he wrote it.

We have added the Responding to the Spirit and the final Prayer to each reading so that they can be used as a daily devotion if desired.

Addresses for correspondence:

the.ingrams@iinet.net.au

jgturner@iinet.net.au

+61 412 274 559 (Mark)

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Mark Ingram
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1

A LIFE WORTH LIVING¹

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF".¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. . . .

²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:14-17, 24-25 NASB

Living in Love

Do you want to live in love, treating your neighbour as Jesus commanded? Not biting or devouring nor being consumed by each other? Evil always begets evil, but love gives birth to love. So Paul's advice is: "*Walk by the Spirit.*"

When my wife and I got into our first home, a short time after we were married, it was my task to do some gardening. I turned over the soil, fertilised it, and put in pumpkin seeds. And you know what I got? Watermelons. I put in some sweet pea seeds and up came daisies. You don't believe me? No, because God is not mocked for whatever one sows that's what is reaped.

There's absolutely no possibility of anything else. What you sow you reap and God is not in the habit of making exceptions for believers. Therefore it is most essential that our life is a "*sowing to please the Spirit*".²

Living by the Spirit

What is more, we must not fall foul of the old Greek dichotomy which claims the *spirit* is the mind, and *flesh* is the body, so that we renounce the body and cultivate the mind (do our studies, whip our minds, read our books, love our theology) while we damp down the natural demands of our body. No, this is not what Paul is saying.

Christ indwells each Christian and their body is the Lord's.³ Consequently Paul is not referring to the mind as distinct from the body. The biblical distinction is between what finds its origin in God and what finds its origin in humankind. So the word rendered here in many translations as *flesh*, regularly stands for "human beings by themselves". God did not create us to be *human by ourselves*.

As human beings, we are meant to be always God-directed, God-indwelt and God-fulfilled. Fulfilment is never possible for us on the human level with simply our human horizons. Human goals so set will always be frustrated. The Lord illustrated this by the man who had a bumper harvest and said, "*I will pull down my old barns and I'll build larger ones. Then I'll gather it all in, sit back in my armchair and puff away at my pipe. Oh, my soul will have a grand and glorious time.*" But Jesus said of him: "*You fool, this very night your soul shall be required of you*".⁴

But material things are not to be despised for they are a part of life. It's what we make of them that matters. They must never be ends, but means to the fulfilment of the divine purposes. In some contexts the word *flesh*, meaning *humans in themselves*, is morally neutral, simply referring to a person living under human conditions, but when *flesh* is used in a bad sense (as here in Galatians 5) it means humanity living for those limited horizons produced by purely human aspirations. We need to learn how to recognise what is coming from the *flesh* —from the human horizon — and what is coming from the *Spirit*. That is not easy for it is one thing to recognise origins and another to plumb the divine origin.

Living through Surrender

Joshua and his people had crossed the river Jordan and spiritually were already in the Promised Land. Now Joshua and his people were about to attack Jericho. It was an impregnable city, impossible to capture. As Joshua was by the river meditating and contemplating strategy, a man stood opposite him with his sword drawn. Joshua went up to him and said, "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" What was the reply then given? "Neither, but as captain of the Lord's host have I now come." Joshua threw himself down and worshipped.⁵

Christian leaders never reach any God-given goal if they have not come to a place of surrender, saying — not merely in words but in the depths of their heart — "I am not my own, I am yours." It is easy to say it: it is quite another thing to follow through. Nevertheless, there has to be for every Christian a time when we completely abandon ourselves to the Lord, so crucifying the *flesh* that we "walk by the Spirit". That is, we recognise that anything that is spiritually fruitful will not come from any ingenuity of human organisation, not even from prayer. For prayer of itself has no power; but through prayer, the power of God is released. No matter what we do it must be a means of allowing the power of God, the work of the Spirit, to be manifested and to operate.

This is the most essential thing. The study of the Word of God, essential though it be, does not fulfil its function as God fully intends if we have not learnt to recognise what is *of the Spirit* and what is *of the flesh*. Woe betide anyone who thinks they have learnt it all and demands the same of everybody else!

The Scripture urges the Spirit-controlled person to restore anyone who has slipped below the Spirit's standard. Be sympathetic, be careful to love and to share, so that together in fellowship we will learn afresh that it's only through the power of the Spirit that the spiritual life reaches its goal.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

God has great plans for each of us as we *walk in the Spirit*. What is on your heart today that needs to be tested as to whether it is a human goal or one given by the Spirit? Or are you limiting your horizons because you doubt your capacity to achieve all that is on your heart? Open yourself to the glorious possibilities of life in the Spirit today.

PRAYER

Our Father, we give ourselves to you again today for all that you desire to do through us. We thank you for the material blessings we have received from your hand. We appreciate the wonderful way you have made each one of us. Now we want to live life to the full through your Spirit. And we are prepared to see our future as you do, through the Spirit. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Achievement in Living*, No. 1 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Galatians 6:8.

³ 1 Corinthians 6:19.

⁴ Luke 12:16-20.

⁵ Joshua 5:13-15.

2

SHARING IN GOD'S STRATEGY FOR HIS WORLD¹

All things are yours . . . and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1 Corinthians 3:22-23

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. . . .²²For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together right up to now.²³And not only this, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we groan within ourselves.²⁴For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

²⁶In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;²⁷and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:19, 22-28 NASB

Shouting “Glory!”

Have you read of Billy Bray, the Methodist lay-preacher? Billy loved to say “Glory!” He said, “If they put me in a barrel I would shout ‘glory’ through the bung-hole,” for he added, “I am a child of the King and I own the world.”

Do these words, “*All things are yours and you belong to Christ and Christ to God*” make you want to shout “Glory”? They should!

What a glorious connection is expressed here! I own everything and Christ owns me, and Christ is intertwined with God eternally. This thought is even richer when we put it alongside the Romans passage, for Paul reminds us that it is true even while we also share in the common frailty of being *flesh* — sharing in the natural world.

Groaning with Nature

Are you groaning? Not growling — that’s different. We are to wait eagerly for what has not yet come — the redemption of our bodies. “*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope.*” (verse 24) You haven’t seen anybody getting about in their resurrection body yet, have you? “*But if we expect what we do not now see, then with perseverance we eagerly wait for it.*”

Groaning with the Spirit

Paul goes on to say in verse 26: “*And in the same way your praying operates.*” I who have the first fruits of the Spirit am moving on to the divine goal and I am involved in that goal. Meanwhile, though in a way not always outwardly expressed, the Spirit prays in and through me, for the groaning of the whole creation becomes specific in me by the ministry of the Spirit.

Life in the Spirit is a harmonious life which reconciles me to God, to creation and also to the divine strategy that links the other two.

When I was a teenager I was converted in a strong evangelical church and we sang hymns which had to do with salvation. But we ignored the songs about trees and birds, saying that they didn’t fit our theology. It was some time before I saw that it is my Father’s world, that I belong to Him, and that God made the world for us to enjoy. He didn’t intend us to repudiate the world of nature. True, He’s going to change it one day, but in the meantime it’s still His and He put us in it to enjoy it to the full. It’s ours.

It comes as a tremendous thrill to know that I am in God's world and it's mine. It's a part of God's voice to me. *"The heavens declare the glory, of God and the earth His handiwork"*.² This includes not just admiring nature but listening to the voice of the One who made it and urges us to live in harmony with it.

Sighing with the Saints

The second element in our groaning lies in our availability to Christ for His campaign against evil in all its forms — that is, joining His programme of world evangelism, church planting, and acting as stalwarts for righteousness and justice. In all this the Spirit helps us for we are naturally weak. The word *weak* is used of our sheer humanity. It does not refer to our sinfulness nor to sickness. God knows our frame and the limitations.

In this great ongoing programme of God moving the whole creation to its grand and glorious climax, how can I pray adequately in my own little corner? I *want* to pray for myself and my wife and my children, of course. They're in the corner with me. But even for them when I don't know *how* to pray, the Spirit, who's working out the divine strategy, moves into my weakness. He takes my limitations upon Himself. But when He chooses to do that, as is His sovereign will and right, He is not going to be satisfied with the status quo. The Spirit within moves in the direction of God's programme because He acts in line with the will and purpose of God.

As Christians we are new creatures in Christ³ and so we have the same potential as Christ during His ministry. As the Spirit works through us to fulfill our part in God's ongoing campaign, He intercedes with inarticulate sighing — sighs that are His yearnings, for these yearnings cannot be expressed simply in human language. The ways of God are past finding out.

So this passage tells us that in the whole programme of God, the Spirit, who knows the depths and the lengths, is the One who moves within us to will and to do God's good pleasure. We discover as we move along with the Lord, that He surprises us with what He has planned. Have you not found it so?

Surely you have, because the Spirit within is pleading on your behalf, laying hold of your limitations, praying according to God's eternal purposes. The net result is that if you walk with Christ, submitting yourself to Him, He will lead you and enable you to do your part in His grand strategy.

You will find Romans 8:28-29 eloquently applicable: “We know that God is causing all things to work together for good to those who are committed to (who love) God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Are you very aware of your personal limitations? Do you hear the Spirit groaning on your behalf? Or perhaps you feel deeply the pain of this world. Thank God that you are part of his plan and the Spirit is inviting you to participate fully in it. You are to be a channel of the Spirit’s hope.

PRAYER

God, we do not always see or understand what you are doing, but we acknowledge this world is yours and you give it to us to enjoy and to protect and to be your agents. We give ourselves to you for this task and we look forward to sharing in your glory. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Sharing in God’s Strategy*, No. 2 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Psalm 19:1.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

3

GOD'S GOOD WILL OF LOVE FOR US¹

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:28-32

Defeated by Ignorance and Fear

Mary Welch tells this story. “One day I went into the yard and found a small distressed kitten. Being starved it had struggled to the house from a distant shed where it had been born and had lived without knowledge of a human being. Through instinct for survival it had moved from the place of death to a seeming place of life. Parasites added to its hunger pangs. Upon my first sight of the little creature I formed a picture concerning it, representing my plan for it. I saw it clear of parasites and sores, well nourished and content.

I also saw a pattern for doing my will. I would feed it well, take it up in my hands, remove the parasites, and anoint the sores. But alas, I found it not possible to get close enough to the kitten to show to it or execute my benevolent intentions. It had grown without human fellowship and became so terrified at the sight of me that it fled in wild panic under a shed where it

was impossible for me to reach it. There it died in a place of its own choice far beyond the reach of my superior wisdom and loving hands. To this ignorant cat-mind, all its hunger, soreness and sickness together constituted absolute security compared to the ultimate calamity of falling into my hands.”

Surely no human creature would ever be so foolish as this kitten? Then says Mary Welch, “I have been, haven’t you?”²

God’s Good Will for Us

Verses 26-27 of Romans 8 (which we looked at yesterday) indicate that our praying is to be related to the tremendous movement of God to a glorious climax within and on the world and particularly in Christians. As the Spirit of God is praying in us, interceding with us, laying hold of our weakness, He is able, in spite of our limitations, to achieve the divine purpose. That is wonderful!

That is why we know that God causes all things to work together for good (verse 28). But what good? Not merely a generalised good, but the good that God has planned encompassing the wide sweep of His purposes and goals. The Spirit of God weaves everything to move in that direction.

This particularly applies to those who respond to Him and who are being called according to that plan. To explain that statement Paul indicates that God is not working blind! Sometimes when we have to work out at the College of which I am the Principal where the students are to serve their field placements, we ponder, “Would this one fit here? Would that one fit there?” This is a yearly exercise. But God doesn’t work like that. He knows beforehand how everything can fit into place. Isn’t that wonderful?

In His foreknowledge He has worked into his glorious plan every one of us who belongs to Jesus, that is, who is “*conformed to the likeness of His Son*”. This goal is in His mind and it will be achieved. None can deny Him this. As a result Christ will be head of “*the church of the firstborn ones, whose names are written in heaven*”.³ The word *firstborn* is the language, not of numerical birth order, but of *inheritance*. We in Christ are the ones through whom God pours Himself and fulfils His plans. This is a glorious truth to live by!

Jesus' Love Longs for Our Response

All this says to us that God's concern and love for us is absolute, and that His love for us is a love which is fellowship and sharing. God wants more than anything else from you — your very self. The story of Mary and Martha illustrates this well. Martha was doing what she excelled in — making her scones and cake. But Mary couldn't care less whether they were pumpkin scones or just plain self-raising flour. She sat at the feet of Jesus. What was Jesus' attitude? Mary has chosen the better part. "Martha, you're just bogged down with all your serving."

As a young Christian I wanted to do the right thing by God — read my Bible, pray, and be ready to work in His Kingdom. It took me some time to realise that though those things are good and proper, what God wanted firstly was myself. Have you come to that? Or do you have the image of the perfect Christian — one who is ever active in the things of the Kingdom of God? Or maybe, you are like that little kitten in Mary Welch's story — scared of God. "*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*".⁴ But it is marvellous to *put* yourself there. You discover you are in the hands of Absolute Love.

Loving and Obeying

God's right over me is absolute. He made me; I am His. But love doesn't talk about rights. A wife has rights in law as a wife. They are there; they are a part of the marriage bond. But where love rules, rights are not discussed. Our relationship with God in Christ is just that. God is my Creator. I am his creature I can't do what I like. But I am His, and what great blessings flow from that!

Putting it another way, the sense of duty is there. But duty becomes loving to please the Lord. Duty is transformed into the privilege of love.

Listen then to the language of love: "*He whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed into the image of His Son.*" This is not simply the language of an eternal decree that must be obeyed, no matter what. We are called into a love relationship with a God who is able to fulfil in me the part God has chosen for me in the great sweep of the divine plan and programme.

Can we do less than wholeheartedly commit ourselves to Him through Christ? Said Jesus, “*Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we [Father and Son] will come to them and make our home with them*”.⁵

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

It is God’s love to which we are responding. And His divine plan for our life worked out in our love relationship with Him. Are you, like Mary Welsh’s kitten, afraid to put your whole being into the hands of this loving God? Don’t be, because this is the God who gave everything in His love for you.

PRAYER

Father, we come to you through Jesus by the empowering of the Spirit because we want the same relationship that we see between Father, Son and Spirit. Bathe us in that love, reassure us of your plans for us, and transform us by your grace. AMEN.

¹ First published as *The Dynamic Will of Love*, No. 3 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Mary Welch, *The Hands of Prayer*.

³ Hebrews 12:23.

⁴ Hebrews 10:31.

⁵ John 14:23.

4

LETTING THE SPIRIT OF GOD LEAD US IN FAITH¹

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Romans 8:14

Habakkuk says:

*I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.*

Then the Lord replied:

*'Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.
For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will not delay.
See, he is puffed up;
his desires are not upright—
but the righteous will live by their faithfulness—*

Habakkuk 2:1-4

Faith's Vision

God, in creating human beings, gave them a commission.² Under God, they were to rule the universe.³ The Christian life then, is a life of faith. It is trusting in Christ, because God has come into focus in the person of Jesus

Christ. Christian faith as a life style has this essential element called *vision* or *hope* or *expectation*. Faith always has a forward-looking aspect.

If we are to live by faith then we will always be committed to the dynamic ongoing programme of God. Faith is not simply that I sit in the presence of God. You can't stay with God very long before you are sharing in what He is doing. You are given a vision of the current programme of the Lord.

The prophet Habakkuk had a problem impacting on his life as a Hebrew. The Children of Israel were being punished for their wickedness, but the means of punishment was a nation even worse than they were — the Chaldeans. Habakkuk brought his complaint to God. How is it that God was using the wicked Babylonians for punishment of His own people?

So God told him to go to his prayer tower and he would understand. Habakkuk replies: *"I will stand on my guard post, my prayer post, to station myself on the rampart and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me and how I may reply when I am reproved."* The Lord answered his expectation. *"Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets that the one who reads it may run, for the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail."*

This particular passage was very real to us in Queensland back in the 1970's when we thought of leaving the old Baptist College property at West End, Brisbane, for a new campus. Some said we were dreamers and it couldn't be done. It involved too many problems — mainly financial. But the old property was cramped and we could not do anything about it. We needed air to breathe and room for expansion.

Dilemma

Still they said, "Well, it sounds good, but however are you going to get that plan off the ground?" There were financial problems to surmount — we needed to sell the old property first, but we couldn't sell it until the denomination decided we had sufficient funds to proceed with the total plan.

Thus we were caught on the horns of a dilemma. Firstly, we needed an adequate offer for the old property, which we valued at \$100,000 [1970's prices!]. Chuckling, critics said, "You'll be lucky to get much more than \$50,000." How we got \$150,000 is a marvellous story in itself!

Secondly, the churches surprisingly gave us permission to launch an appeal for \$100,000. Some said, "Queensland Baptists have never raised

anything like that in a single appeal! No big appeal has ever yet reached its full target — you'll get \$75,000 at the most and only if you really work at it." We did work at it, and for four months one of the ministers served as appeal director and over \$105,000 was raised. Why was this successful? Because a vision had been given to us and we believed it was from God. We waited upon Him in days and nights of prayer to see His vision fulfilled. And we believed it was His time. "For the vision is yet for the appointed time." There are always two parts to a vision — the nature of the vision, and the time of its fulfilment. God's time had come. We waited to know His Spirit-led steps. If you just wait for everything to be in kitty before you move, sight dominates faith. There has to be a balance between them.

Forward-Looking

Hebrews 11:1 defines this expectant element: "*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" Faith always operates in the arena of a *tomorrow* which will become *today*. God works according to a predetermined goal. His acts are eschatological. This should be characteristic also of His people.

Our major problem is to know what is this God-given goal. And that's not easy. Sometimes it comes in flashes, sometimes it comes easily, sometimes after patiently waiting upon God. There is no one road to His revelation. But a Spirit-given vision is a must.

It is quite difficult to distinguish between personal ambition and the purpose of God. God puts you into a place for the purposes of growth. But never fall foul of the silly idea (which is quite unbiblical) that you don't have to do anything, you just wait upon God and He will do everything. God's commission is work: "Be fruitful, fill the earth, grow, take over".⁴ So growth is written within the very fibre of biblical faith. Spiritual growth within ourselves, growth of souls, growth in the work of God, are his order. Yet the ego can be wrapped up in that anticipated growth. Therein lies our problem.

God usually does not give early success to young leaders. The tendency to human pride is so easy — no one is freed from its possibility. So we need to distinguish human ambition from divine vision. The way to keep yourself from failure here is to make sure that the growth of the soul accompanies the fulfilment of the vision. Growth in me as well as growth in the programme of God is vital.

Continuing

Habakkuk reminds us, *“The righteous will live by their faithfulness.”* It’s wider than just the initial act of faith. The life of faith is a life of continuing faithfulness. *“I have been crucified with Christ,”* said Paul, *“and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”*.⁵ That’s a marvellous start for a Christian but the verse goes on, *“and the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.”* It does not say by faith *in* Christ (as some translations have it), but *of* Christ – by all that is wrapped up in that wonderful person called Jesus. I just live in Him and with Him and for Him.

The response of my heart to God is the same response that Jesus in his time on earth made to His Father. I live by the faith of all that is attached to the lovely name of Jesus. That’s what Paul says. Do you know any better way?

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

What vision has God laid on your heart? Are you able to put it into words? Has the right time come for God to bring it to pass? Talk to Him about it and let His Spirit prepare you for the next step in your life of faith.

PRAYER

God, you know we want you most of all, and we want to be part by faith of your programme for this world and your people. Save us from presumption and selfish ambition, and help us to live by the faith of your Son in us, AMEN.

¹ First published as *Spirit of God Leading*, No. 4 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Genesis 1:28.

³ Hebrews 2:8.

⁴ Genesis 1:28, cf. John 5:17.

⁵ Galatians 2:20.

5

ETERNAL LIFE – REAL LIFE¹

*Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap **eternal life**.*

Galatians 6:8

Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

⁵*But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' ⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give **eternal life**.*

Romans 2:4-7

Faith Expressed in Action

Put these two passages of Paul's alongside each other. Some people on reading Romans 2:7 think that Paul says God grants blessings according to our *works* and not to our *faith*. Our doings however reflect the attitudes of our hearts. The word *works* means *actions* – actions which are the result of our motives and our inner attitude.

Paul is here stating a principle, that eternal life is the goal of those who *do good* — but *good* in the New Testament sense. What is it to *do good*? It starts by putting your trust in the God who sent Christ. The definition of *good* is always related to God's act in Christ. And as such it is related to what is given and not to what is earned.

People are Incomplete without Eternal Life

Eternal life was the promise God gave to our first parents, symbolised in the Tree of Life.² Eve's first sin was to doubt the truth God spoke. She broke with God and said, "I will go independent of God." This was an irrational assertion because it can't be done. But it created in her mind and heart a disruption between her and God. Because Eve had sinned in her heart she took of the fruit of the tree. What is in the inner heart always comes before any outer action. The overt act simply publicises the condition of the heart. As a consequence, the Tree of Life was guarded by the cherubim with the flaming sword³ and the possibility of having eternal life was lost to humankind.

Eternal life is God's own intrinsic life — the life of the Eternal One. Some suggest that God took away the Holy Spirit from our first parents when they sinned, but the Bible does not say this. The gift of the Spirit, that is, people sharing God's own life, was not possible at the beginning, in the initial creative act. The final self-giving of God in love is only realised subsequently in our free response to that love. The ensuing story of humanity is woven around God's promise to share in an ultimate way His own life with us: He made us with that intention.

So we read that human apostasy after Noah's flood was offset by God's promise to Abraham and this finally realises itself in a community of the redeemed.⁴ God brought these descendents of Abraham, these Israelites, out of Egypt to be their God. This meant not merely for them to have access to the One who is beyond all of His creation, but for Him to be their God by being present in their midst. God said: "Have them make a sanctuary and I will dwell among them".⁵ The tabernacle was so constructed and its ritual inaugurated to make it possible, not for people to come near to God, but for **God to come to us**. This makes all the difference. Israel's history is God sharing His life in a limited way among His people.

The next advance was God living in humanity. "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [tabernacle] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only [the Only Begotten] of the Father, full of grace and truth*".⁶ This is eternal life in human form. Here is God sharing His very self with humanity, the incarnation, God coming into focus in the Person of Christ.

But this Christ of ours had to do something about the sin that spoiled humanity. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The Incarnation leads on inevitably to Calvary and the Resurrection; and this

whole process was with a view to the bestowal of the Holy Spirit – not as a kind of holy option but as the primary purpose — God giving Himself to you and me.

Yet Eternal Life is More Than Christ in Me

When Peter said believers in Christ would receive the gift of the Spirit,⁷ God was saying through Peter, “*You come to Christ for forgiveness and I’ll indwell you.*” That’s the language Jesus Himself used in John 14:23. Since Pentecost, those who trust in Christ are indwelt by God. In other words, they possess eternal life, real life, abundant life. But what do we possess? Not some *thing*, but some *person*: all of God’s blessings are in persons, not things. So the one who has eternal life, has Christ. And the one who has Christ, has this real, eternal life. John was able to say, “We’ve touched, we’ve handled eternal life” because they had touched Jesus Christ.⁸

How then can we, as Christians in this present moment, enjoy eternal life? It is not simply having the Son live in me. It is His life being lived **in** and **through** me, as Paul states in Galatians 2:20. Eternal life is not a thing. It is not a condition. It is Christ present in and effective through me.

Understanding Transformed

Many years ago, when I first saw this truth in Scripture, it transformed my understanding of the abundant Christian life. It is not my being aware of the requirements of Scripture for my living, it is simply saying to the Lord Jesus: “Lord, what do you want to do in me and through me today?” It transforms Christian ethics from doing good, to letting the *good* God do His *good* through me. My part, then, is to discover the *good* that our Lord wants to do and give my consent to it. If we love Him we keep His commandments.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Do you want to fully experience eternal life, real, abundant, thriving life, to have it as the goal of your present life? Do you want to *be* good, *do* the good? Then enjoy God’s presence within as you say “Yes!” to the Spirit working in and through you today.

PRAYER

Lord, what do you want to do in us and through us today? We want to fully obey, to fully cooperate with your purposes. Most of all we want Christ's life within as you have promised. We give ourselves to you again for this day and for all the good that through your Spirit you purpose to do. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Eternal Life – the Goal of Action*, No. 5 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Genesis 2:9.

³ Genesis 4:22.

⁴ Genesis 22:16-18.

⁵ Exodus 25:8.

⁶ John 1:14.

⁷ Acts 2:38.

⁸ 1 John 1:1.

6

LIVE ETERNALLY NOW¹

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

*“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give **eternal life** to all those you have given him. ³Now this is **eternal life**: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

John 17:1-3

Eternal Life is Knowing the Father

Are you living eternally? I don't mean, are you going to go on living? Jesus said: “Because I live you shall live also”.² Scripture speaks of enjoying eternal life now. No doubt there will be a new dimension in the world to come but we also have the guarantee of eternal life right now for today. This eternal life is in the Person of Jesus Christ.

John 17:1-3 defines eternal life. Jesus said: “*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. . . . Now this is **eternal life**: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*”

To glorify is to put on display to show off the grandeur and the wonderfulness of the thing or person glorified. It always displays intrinsic character – here the character of the Son. And this is what we are invited to share in. In Scripture ‘to know’ is mutually to share. “*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son*”.³ That mutual but exclusive knowing is sharing a common life. On receiving eternal life, we

are introduced into a fellowship of personal communication, of complete sharing and knowing with God the Father and the Son.

John 17:23 links this knowing to living. *"I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* Love has no intrinsic limit. The love of the Father for the Son is the same as the love of the Father for us. It is hard to believe this. But as it was said by Christ it must be true.

Eternal Life is Trusting the Father

Living eternally and abundantly is shown in many ways. One important area is that we now have a sense of our oneness in God. Before, we were fighting for our place in the world, now we fight no longer. God has taken care of all that. Before, we had ambition to be somebody and to do some great thing. Even in God's service we can work to reach some goal which can be merely a personal ambition. But no longer does that need to take possession of me. My Father has planned and His plans are marvellous. Therefore, I do not need to strive for position, for the Father knows me.

Moreover, my Father has plans and I am one with Him. When it comes to facing new situations or new challenges, we can be at rest with what God has placed on our plate. There may be something wholesome you dish up to your children, but they push the plate away, refusing it. If God has some needy vegetables, if God has something for us and puts it on our plate, then sometimes we may not like it but it is still good for us. My human father once, but only once, tried to get me to eat a plate of sago. He was not successful! If it had been rice, that would have been a different story! God's good things are always good for us.

What has Father God put on your plate? Our Heavenly Father never makes a mistake in what He puts there. It will be just what we need for the nourishment of our soul and for the building up of our spiritual body. The old woman who lived in the shoe had so many children she didn't know what to do. But God doesn't live in a shoe and He never gets caught out not knowing what to do. That there are so many of His children in the world is no problem to Him!

I am a child of the King. As long as I don't say that He loves me a little more than the person next to me, why shouldn't I enjoy being loved by my Father? His love for me is the same love that He has for His Son. And I am His son.

Eternal Life is Resting in the Father

In our modern day much of our sickness is self induced. The wrong emotional reactions that I undergo produce some malfunction in my body. Normally the body is made to function on a proper emotional level, but if this level is disturbed over a lengthy period, bodily reactions of a harmful kind result.

Of course, not every sick person is so because of disturbed emotions, or every sickness the result of a particular sin. There are some health difficulties that come from genetic conditions; some problems arise from malnutrition or unbalanced diet; some bodily ailments come from lack of exercise. People ministering in spiritual things need to learn how to live a victorious life in the area of emotions. Otherwise, how can they serve others who are disturbed? Think of the divorces and the broken homes and outcome of all this in the community. So how can we in the middle of all this emotional chaos, live the eternal, the real, the abundant life?

My doctor told me that all the cells of body tissue (though perhaps not the nerve cells) are completely changed periodically. Since I visited him last, I expect all my cells are now completely new, though I feel the same. Similarly, we are outwardly changing and our inner life impinges on this changing body life.

Some specialists in psychosomatic medicine suggest that there are two fundamental disturbing emotions — anger and fear. It is discouraging to attempt to rid a house of flies when there are 10,000 of them, but easy when there are only two. Let us by the Spirit pick up a swatter and go to work on the two flies that have messed up so many lives. This is done by letting the realities of our real, eternal life take over as suggested in Ephesians 4:31 and Romans 8:13. If we deal with these two “flies” by replacing them with the positive fruit of the Spirit as we live in Christ and He lives in us, we are beginning to live eternally.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Are you aware of how much more your life could be if you realised this quality of real eternal life now? Are selfish ambition, anger or fear or some other emotion dominating you? Live eternal life now! You can know the Father, trust the Father, rest in the Father that what He is giving you through His Spirit is the best possible for you. Thank Him for it.

PRAYER

We come to you, our Good Father with hands open, knowing that we will receive only good from you. We thank you for this eternal life you give us here and now, and we face the future knowing there is only more of the same good life in store for us. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Living Eternally Now*, No. 6 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² John 14:19.

³ Matthew 11:27.

7

SOWING TO PLEASE THE SPIRIT¹

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow. ⁸Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:7-9

Knocking the Spirit?

One way of understanding how to “*sow to please the Spirit*” is to note what the Scriptures say about “knocking” the Spirit and to make sure that we do not become *knockers*. The terms for *knocking the Spirit* in the New Testament are “blaspheming”, “resisting”, “insulting”, “grieving”, “quenching”. Today we will consider the first three of these terms and then the last two later.

Each of these three — blaspheming, resisting, insulting — refer to rejecting the Spirit’s work of revealing or bringing to the light the coming of the promised Messiah of Israel. It is always dangerous for us to reject the light and to continue in the darkness. We get lost! The continuing principle is that light refused means darkness prolonged. As John 3:19 says: “*Light has come into the world but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*” Christ is the true light and if we do not accept Him we walk in darkness.² The specific work of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world that rejecting Christ is the sin of sins.³

Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit

This specifically means rejecting consciously and deliberately the clear enlightenment the Spirit gives us about God’s saving work in Christ. The

references in Matthew 12:31, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10 illustrate this. In this incident from their confrontation with Jesus, the warning was given to the Pharisees because it was God's Spirit through Christ who performed the exorcism of demons.⁴ The exorcism was admitted by the Pharisees, but they denied its source of power. The divine purpose of these acts by the Spirit, as always, was to demonstrate the person and presence of Jesus as Messiah and it was of this fact that Jesus reminded John the Baptist.⁵ The task given to Jewish leaders, as always, was to test the prophets to distinguish the false from the real and in particular to recognise the Messiah.⁶

Resisting the Holy Spirit

Stephen charged the Jewish leaders with extreme resistance of the Holy Spirit.⁷ After reviewing this pattern throughout God's dealings with Israel, he asserted that their current leaders, the Pharisees, were the same – full of self-pride (*"stiff-necked"*) and in no way devoted to God's glory (*"uncircumcised in heart"*). Their pride was to continually set themselves against the Holy Spirit in His messianic revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus *"came to His own affairs but the majority of His own people did not receive Him. But to those who individually received Him God gave the right to become children of God."* In this way the darkness of the leaders did not overwhelm the light seen in Jesus. It shone into the hearts of those who believed on His Name.⁸ The Spirit's ministry continues to take the things of Christ and make them real to us.⁹ So to be acceptable to God, all our worship and Christian service must be Christ-centred, not centred on ourselves. Our style of worship, our programmes of church activity and our outreach empowered by the Spirit, must be Christ honouring, motivated for His glory alone.

Insulting the Holy Spirit

This expression occurs in Hebrews 10:29: *"How much more severely do you think those deserve to be punished who have trampled the Son of God underfoot, who have treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who have insulted the Spirit of [the] grace?"* It refers to the act of treating with scornful insolence the Spirit's ministry in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The word grace in the Greek has an article and refers specifically to the Spirit's revelation of God's faithfulness in sending the

Messiah to His covenant people, Israel, who had been set apart for God. Both Ephesians 2:12 and Romans 9:4 refer to these covenant promises given to Israel which are treated contemptuously by Israel's rejection of the Spirit's revelation in Christ. Notice, in passing, that Paul applied the same principle of judgment to the rejection of the Spirit's illumination by the unrepentant Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, declaring this was the reason for their consequent failure to receive eternal life.¹⁰

Warnings in the Book of Hebrews

The seriousness of rejecting the Spirit of God is seen in the frequent warnings in the book written specifically to the Hebrews. The Jews of Jesus day rejected their Messiah even after the display of the Spirit's power through Him pointed to the reality of Jesus as their Messiah. These warnings¹¹ emphasise three basic things.

Firstly, they remind us that God's speaking in Christ was associated with demonstrations of power. They were intended to draw attention to his identity as Messiah and were made possible by the Holy Spirit (2:4). In observing them the people tasted the heavenly gift, becoming participants in this illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit (6:4). Hebrews 10:26 states that their deliberate failure to accept the Lord was after and in spite of their receiving this knowledge of the truth of Christ.

Secondly, the passages warn against rejecting the illumination because of unbelief (3:19). Such unbelief can occur out of sheer neglect (2:3), by absence of the act of faith (4:2), through deliberate rejection (6:6), in knowingly continuing in sin (10:26), or by refusing the command of the Father in Heaven given in His Son (1:2, 12:25).

Thirdly, they warn that judgment is certain as a result of this rejection, because forgiveness is only possible through faith in Christ, the one whom they are rejecting. In this regard the following dire warnings are used: *"There is no escape"* (2:3); *"It is impossible if they fall away to be brought back to repentance"* since faith did not occur (6:6); There can only be a *"fearful expectation of judgment"* (10:27); and *"we shall not escape judgment"*. (12:25).

The Hebrew Christian readers are reminded however that the writer in giving these warnings does not have them in mind. They were not the ones who had not rejected the Spirit's revelation in Christ but were instead enjoying salvation (6:9).

The opposite of *knocking* the Spirit is *sowing to please* the Spirit. In doing this we give heed to all the Spirit reveals, realising that that revelation is always Christ-centred and the goal is always Christ-glorifying. God's bountiful actions are always woven around the Saviour. All the promises of God are YES in Christ.¹² Let us listen to the Spirit as Christ urges us.¹³

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

We are enjoying our saving life in Christ, walking in the light. We have seen demonstrations of his power in our own life and in others. And all God's promises to us are "Yes" in Christ as we listen to Him. But what of our friends? God yearns that they too stop knocking Him and live their life to please the Spirit.

PRAYER

We thank you our Father for all that we have through Christ who is our "Yes". We bring to you those for whom we fear the warnings of Hebrews will mean being eternally separated from you. We give ourselves to be channels of your Spirit's call to them to stop the resisting and instead realise the delights of walking in the light. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Acting on the Spirit's Revelation*, No. 7 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² John 12:35.

³ John 16:9.

⁴ Matthew 12:28.

⁵ Matthew 11:5.

⁶ Deuteronomy 18:19, Acts 3:22, 7:37.

⁷ Acts 7:51.

⁸ John 1:5-12.

⁹ John 16:13-15.

¹⁰ Acts 13:45.

¹¹ At Hebrews 2:1-4, 4:1-3, 6:4-9, 10:26-29; 12:25-26.

¹² 2 Corinthians 1:20.

¹³ Revelation 2:11,17.



A CALL TO QUIT RESTRICTING THE SPIRIT¹

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:20-30

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not hold prophecies in contempt.

1 Thessalonians 5:19,20

Don't Knock, rather . . .

Yesterday we noted the warnings of Scripture about *knocking* the Spirit by refusing the enlightenment He brings. Today we see from the positive side Christians urged to let the Spirit have His way and enjoy Him in collective worship.

Frequently the New Testament writers give us the negative to highlight the positive. For instance the Lord's Prayer contains the petition: "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*",² or as Peter says, "*You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ*".³ There are two special words used by Paul to express a negative attitude to the Spirit: to *grieve* Him and to *quench* or *stifle* Him, but each of these is set in a positive context. Let us look at these two attitudes.

Don't Grieve the Spirit, but . . . (Ephesians 4:30)

What does it mean to *grieve the Spirit*? It is the Spirit who specialises in reproducing Christ in us and in cultivating Christ-likeness in our living and the former is the basis of the latter. Paul in Ephesians 4:21-24 has taught truth as it is "in Jesus". Truth is not something *we* achieve but always something *God* has done. The Gospel is never our reaction to God's action – that is too conditional and variable. The Gospel is always God's historic act in Christ. And it is to this divine accomplishment we must respond.

Many translations (such as the NIV above) put verses 21-24 of Ephesians 4 into the form of a command as if all by ourselves we are to lay aside the *Old Self*, or the *Old Nature*. But in the Greek it is not a command but an explanation. This is clear from the similar statements in Romans 6:6 and Colossians 3:9 – that the taking off of the old self was God's act in Christ. Our behaviour is to be based on this divine achievement not our own effort.

The expression in the original Greek is literally *Old Man* or better still *Old Humanity* and is to be understood in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:45 in the line of Adam. Our *Old Humanity* is what we were as natural members of the human race. But now we are Christians, we are new creatures in the *New Humanity*, created in Christ Jesus.⁴ And the centre of this New Humanity is the indwelling Spirit.⁵

Love as the Motivating Force

Love is the hallmark of the Christian but the motivation of love does not in itself bring enlightenment. My wife loved our first child — a daughter — but she still studied books on child care and attended baby clinics. Love says: “If I know what is best I will do it.” The Ten Commandments are a part of the divine telling, letting us know what is expected. They are the essential negatives upon which the positive living can operate. A godly Hebrew lived in the reality of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, loving his Lord and keeping the instruction his Lord had given. “*If you love Me you will keep My words,*” said Jesus.⁶

On the basis then of God’s creation in us of a *New Humanity*, Paul lists the negatives to be repudiated and the positives to be cultivated. Liars are to become truth tellers; stealers to become givers; and malicious speakers to become helpful talkers. With respect to motivation, the old bitterness of the self-life of the *Old Humanity* is to be replaced by kindness and a readiness to forgive. To grieve the Spirit, then, is us failing to co-operate with Him in negating the characteristics of the *Old Humanity* so that he can reproduce in us of the characteristics of our *New Humanity* in Christ. Paul in Galatians 2:20 expresses this whole matter in the words, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me [God’s act]. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me*” [arising from our response to God’s act of love].

Don’t Stifle the Spirit, but . . . (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

Grieving the Spirit has to do with personal character and Christ-likeness, but Paul’s instruction to Thessalonians about not *stifling* the Spirit is in the context of Christian worship and the exercise of the gifts given in grace.⁷ To *prophesy* in the New Testament majors on the application of the Word of God to present moral situations in both individual and collective settings. So the Christian must not restrict the Spirit’s movement within the Christian fellowship.

But all forms of worship involve human response. So we must assess all worship behaviour and retain only that which is good, abstaining from any procedure that is unhelpful or that does not enhance the Name of Christ or extend His kingdom. Today in our impetus to reform old styles of worship by increased member participation and actions, we must hold firmly to the central principle that we worship in the Spirit and in the reality of truth⁸ and

we must take responsibility for assessing whether this is in fact the motivation for what we are doing. Denying the possibility of the Spirit's activity in new worship forms may be *quenching* the Spirit, but so also may be the intrusion of sensuous creaturely activity that stems solely from our human psychological nature and not from the nature of the God we worship.

To state this another way, freedom in the Spirit must not deny the Spirit's sovereignty, whether by repudiating change or by usurping control to prevent the introduction of new forms. The touchstone or yardstick for assessment is the Word of God as it is being taught in the congregation on the one hand, and on the other, our motivation not simply of human enjoyment but a genuine heart praise and thanksgiving. This alone will bring the kind of filling by the Spirit that Paul eloquently anticipates in Ephesians 5:18-20. He contrasts Spirit-inspired joy with human joviality and sensuality which can leave us finally empty, even nauseated.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Is the Spirit gently telling you that you are grieving Him by blocking His renewing work in your life? Open yourself to the Christ-likeness He wants to bring. Or perhaps the issues for you at the moment are how your corporate worship can honour our great God? Let Him bring His truth to that situation as the Spirit illuminates your mind.

PRAYER

Our God, in you we live and move and have our being. We do not want to grieve you or stifle what you want to do in and through us. We respond to your love by asking you to continue your work in us and in our congregation as we acknowledge your sovereignty. AMEN.

¹ First published as *A Call to Quit Restricting the Spirit*, No. 8 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984

² Matthew 6:9ff

³ 1 Peter 1:18,19

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁵ Romans 8:9-11

⁶ John 14:23

⁷ Ephesians 4:7

⁸ John 4:24

9

THE SPIRIT AND THE NEW HUMANITY¹

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. . . . ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you [are putting] to death the [practices] of the body, you shall live.

Romans 8:8,11-13 [author's additions]

Living in Love

This is an interesting and challenging statement by Paul to conclude this passage in Romans. ⁸*“If by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body, you shall live.”* I pondered long over this strange saying before realising that its thought framework was the contrast between life in the Old Humanity and life in the New Humanity. The Old Humanity is what I have from being a member of the human race in Adam. The New Humanity is all that I am as a Christian *in Christ*. Paul is speaking about how the Spirit changes the life-style of a non-Christian into that of the Christian. Let us see if we can grasp the picture Paul is painting.

Non-Christian Life-Style

A foal behaves like a horse through instinct. The human body is born with a range of potential behaviours which can be moulded by the pressures of the

environment – parents, home, social contexts etc. The little baby ego receives stimuli which operate on three levels: body, emotions and mind. These stimuli at the very beginning are almost entirely physical, but the other aspects gradually increase. To every stimulus comes the reaction of the ego and development of drives to satisfy the stimuli. Habits of reaction develop in the purely physical areas, in emotional matters, and in mental states. These are being produced by the reaction of an ego that is naturally self-centred and affected by a sin-bias.

Thus the patterns of reaction created in the physical body cells are the patterns or practices of the Old Humanity — from putting on a jacket to reacting to a punch on the nose; from saying “Thank you” when receiving a gift, to swearing when insulted. Some habits, like putting on a jacket, are physically neutral — neither good nor bad. But most of our reactions are impregnated by the sin-bias of the Old Humanity ego. The reactions become patterned into the cells of the individual’s body — particularly in the brain. This is what is meant by “the practices of the body” — the built-in patterns of behaviour.

Life-Style of the Christian

When a person becomes a Christian the ego is changed. God creates us as new creatures in Christ.² This change of being comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as He transforms us into the likeness of Christ. The regenerated person is expected by God to live in a new life-style that reflects Christ’s behaviour pattern. The problem the Christian faces is the remaining presence in the cells of the body of the tracks produced by the Old Humanity. Some of these need to be radically changed, particularly those involving emotional and spiritual reactions.

Of course there is also the new stimulus within coming from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Immediately on the Spirit coming to live within, much of the old lifestyle disappears in the surge of new life, but there are always, however, aspects of living for which new patterns need to be deliberately created. Growth in grace comes with increasing awareness of what the Spirit desires to alter, and as we build faith’s patterns into our Christian behaviour.

In other words, pattern changing is a Christian must. Note, for instance how frequent these instructions come from Paul who says that, because Christ has died for you and the Spirit indwells you,

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body . . .”

Romans 6:12

To the Colossians:

“You must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, wrath, malice, slander; and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Colossians 3:8-10

To the Philippians:

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”

Philippians 2:14

And to the Ephesians:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each another . . .”

Ephesians 4:32

It is obvious then that the Christian has to do something about old sinful practices. The Old Humanity, rooted in the sinful ego, has been dealt with. It has been cancelled by the Spirit in His indwelling act. But the legacy in the body must be negated and, in the place of the old patterns, new ways of behaving should be appearing.

The principle used by the Spirit is *replacement*. *“The one who has been stealing . . . must work, doing something useful with his own hands”* so that he can give.³ Malice is to be replaced by tender heartedness. How does this principle of replacement work? Let me suggest some steps.

The Process of Re-patterning

We need first to be aware of what belongs to the old pattern and then discover what its opposite is in the new pattern. This awareness comes from understanding God’s scriptural instructions, and sometimes from observing mature Christians. It should also be a part of the church’s instruction for its people.

This implies that the believer’s will needs to be active but it is not an *achieving* will, it is a *consenting* will. *“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him”*.⁴ The grace principle by which we have become Christians is the same for developing a Christian life-style. Paul’s discussion in

Romans 7 is about *will*, not *nature*, for *death* does not mean *extinction* but *separation*. So *putting to death* is the language of negation or separation. I cannot remove my jealousy, for example, by mere human resolve or will, but by the Spirit's negating my jealousy. He does this by replacing my jealousy with my rejoicing with and for the person concerned.

The believer therefore agrees to quit the old habit and at the same time commits himself/herself to the Lord (the Holy Spirit) for Him to produce the new attitude or habit. *"Through Christ Jesus the law [operation] of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death".*⁵

As a habit in its formation frequently needs repeated deliberate acts for it to be set firmly in place, so often we need to exercise repeatedly the replacement habit in this spiritual exercise to make it stick. This is the action we take to allow the free flow of the Spirit's operation, seen supremely in the words of our Lord: *"Do good to those who hate you".*⁶

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

The Spirit may be bringing some old practice of yours to your attention. Can you identify what its replacement should be? Invite the Spirit to do His work of re-patterning as you grow the new godly habit. And as you look back on your life as well as forward to this growth in grace, give thanks for what the He has already done in you.

PRAYER

We thank you our Father that we do not need to be controlled by the Old Humanity but can be alive to your Spirit. Illuminate our understanding to see what you are wanting to do in our lives and lead us into new godliness, for your name's sake. AMEN.

¹ First published as *The Spirit and the New Humanity*, No. 9 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² 2 Corinthians 5:17.

³ Ephesians 4:28.

⁴ Colossians 2:6.

⁵ Romans 8:2.

⁶ Luke 6:27.

10

ENJOYING THE COMFORT
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT¹

^{14:16} *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another **Comforter**, that he may abide with you forever. . . .*

^{14:26} *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the **Comforter**, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. . . .*

^{15:26} *But when the **Comforter** is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: . . .*

^{16:7} *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the **Comforter** will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7 KJV [author's emphasis]

The Comforter

Four times in the Gospel of John the Spirit is called the *Comforter*. Modern translations, feeling that the word *comfort* is inadequate, use other expressions: *Helper*, *Counsellor*, *Advocate* or *Strengtheners*. They lean heavily on the meaning of the original Greek word — “one called alongside to help”. All these translations are attempting to give the reason for the “calling alongside”. But today for a full understanding of the word, we will follow through its meaning from its Old Testament background in the book of Isaiah, a book the Gospels make clear was greatly loved by the Hebrew Jesus.

God the Comforter

Isaiah 40:1-8 begins, “*Comfort, O Comfort, My people*”. This passage is applied by John Baptist to Jesus’ messianic ministry, which John, as forerunner, would introduce.² The message is one of *comfort* for God’s people in a threefold way — sin is dealt with and pardoned, restoration is accomplished, and judgment is declared complete. Because God was the one who would grant this blessing He was called by the Rabbis — *God the Comforter*. This concept is stressed in such other passages as Isaiah 49:13 and 51:3, while in Isaiah 51:12 the Lord said, “*I, even I, am He who comforts you.*”

In 1947 two great events occurred in the Palestine arena. Firstly, two Bedouin Arabs while minding goats, discovered in a cave, jars containing manuscripts belonging to a Hebrew sect, called by scholars ‘The Dead Sea Covenanters’ or ‘The Qumran Community’. They found not only scrolls setting out the community’s regulations, but also copies of most of the Old Testament, including two reproductions of Isaiah dating before the first christian century. Secondly the United Nations passed the historic resolution for the creation of an independent Jewish State in Palestine. When the first Knesset (parliament) of the new nation of Israel met in May, 1948, each Member of Parliament on his desk, found an exact replica of Isaiah 40:1-2 taken from one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. With moist eyes they felt the reality of God’s *comfort* in the re-establishment of the new nation.

Christ the Comforter – the Spirit as Comforter

Jesus referred to the Spirit as “*Another Comforter*” – one just like Himself.³ He was able to say this because the imminent passing of the presence of Jesus would be replaced by the permanent residence of the Spirit in the hearts of the believing disciples — a reality that took place on the Day of Pentecost. The presence of the Spirit would be the presence of Christ Himself.

There are two aspects of this *comforting* ministry of the Spirit – His work when He comes to live within us, and His work of testifying to what God has done. The first two references to the Comforter (14:16 and 14:26) cover the first aspect. The *Comforter* throughout these passages is also called the “*Spirit of Truth*”.⁴ The ideas of *truth* are twofold – the concept of reality – what is eternal and endless; and statements about that abiding reality and its activities. Christ is the Truth⁵, that is, He in Himself is the reality which undergirds the universe and in whom all the purposes of God are fulfilled. Hence

the immediate *comforting* work of the *Spirit of Truth* is to link the believer with *Christ the Truth*. He does this by His coming to live within us. The residence of the Spirit within is equivalent, Jesus said, to the indwelling of the Father and Jesus Himself.⁶ From this residential position the Spirit reveals the truth — details concerning Christ's person and activity⁷ — the "*truth that is in Jesus*".⁸

When Jesus was 40 days old He was presented by his parents to the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem, as required by Leviticus 12:8. God's saint, Simeon, led by the Spirit, took the babe in his arms and blessed God.⁹ Simeon was waiting to see God's comforting act through the provision of a Messiah who would deliver them. The saint recognised in this child the Comforter's provision of salvation for all peoples — light for revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel (verse 32). Because God was called the *Comforter*, the *Messiah* (the One through whom God's comfort would come) was also thought of as the *Comforter*. Anna, the prophetess, who lived continuously in the Temple, also recognised that Jesus was to be the instrument for redemption of Israel.¹⁰ The *Comforting* God had come into focus in His Son, the *Comforter*.

The Spirit's Programme

The second two references to the Spirit as comforter (15:26 and 16:7) have to do with the Spirit's witnessing to those not yet Christians. The Spirit's motivation is love and His work of conviction is with a view to saving those who are lost. Three essential facets of Christ's truth are stressed in John 16:8-11 and these are in line with the *comfort* of Isaiah 40:1,2. The first facet is the question of *sin*. To convince a murderer that he is a murderer and that he ought not to be does not require some special ministry of the Spirit. But to convince people that the sin which keeps them out of the Kingdom is failure to trust in Christ as Saviour *does* require the Spirit's convincing, because it is contrary to the ideas of most non-Christians.

The second facet is that of *restoration*. Convincing people of righteousness is persuading them of both its need and its availability. Jesus says that both are possible "*because I go to my Father*".¹¹ Going to the Father involves both Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The resurrection shows that the Father accepts the Son's lifestyle as the standard of righteousness He requires; while his ascent to the Father's right hand emphasises Christ's

supreme power and authority. In this way, Jesus both restores and grants His righteousness to those who trust Him.

The third facet is that of *judgment* which has already taken place. All the opposing forces of evil led by Satan, the present Ruler of the World of Mankind, have been completely and finally defeated. In Christ we share in the total victory of our Lord. In every temptation we can resist the devil and he will flee,¹² for God provides the way of escape in Christ.¹³

In all of these ways, the Spirit is our comforter, just like God the Father and the Son.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Do you find yourself in need of comfort? For assurance of sin dealt with in Christ's death and resurrection? Or that in the truth that is Jesus, the world makes sense? Or perhaps you need to hear again that Satan is defeated and there is no temptation or suffering that comes to you which you cannot bear? Welcome this reminder that the Comforter is already in residence within you, for Jesus does not leave you an orphan in a fatherless universe.

PRAYER

Father God, we want to enjoy your comfort which the Spirit brings. We open our minds and our hearts to all you want to give us today of your love and grace and truth. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Enjoying the Comfort of the Holy Spirit*, No. 10 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Matthew 3:3.

³ John 14:16.

⁴ John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13.

⁵ John 14:6.

⁶ John 14:23.

⁷ John 14:24, 16:13.

⁸ Ephesians 4:21.

⁹ Luke 2:22-35.

¹⁰ Luke 2:38.

¹¹ John 14:12; 16:16,17

¹² James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

11

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT¹

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Ephesians 6:16-18a

Praying in the Spirit

Ephesians 6:18 says we are to pray “*in the Spirit*”, that is, directed by and energized by the Spirit. Prayer is the shared expressed communication between God and his people. Prayer involves a talking fellowship of love, and a sharing in God’s creative enterprises — personal and collective. Thus prayer is of two kinds: *fellowship* praying and *creating* praying. It is through the praying saint that God’s will is done in human affairs. Let us look at six laws by which the Spirit uses our prayers for His creative work.

The Law of Dependence

Prayer to be effective must be in Christ's *name*.² This means that while we are invited to share in His life and in all His plans, purposes, and programmes, the initiative of planning always remains with Christ. Prayer is thus the believers' response to God's need to have human co-operators bringing into actuality what God has already determined. And God is also the one making it possible. Underlying our dependence is the thanksgiving that arises from our sense of privilege in being co-operators with God, and from being aware that God has every situation completely under His control.

The Law of Obedience

"If my words abide in you", Jesus said.³ Knowing God's will and the purposes of Christ does not come from human intuition, flash insights, promise boxes, or sudden passionate calls upon God. It comes, when we are prepared to be obedient, from revelation by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who searches the depths of God⁴ and reveals them to us. In contrast, Eve listened to the devil's lie that people were able to determine the right path themselves. But Romans 8:26 indicates that there are areas of divine achievement that lie beyond human comprehension. When we make our obedient hearts available, the Spirit, who resides within, also intercedes with our yearnings which cannot be verbalised. All that is achieved in the realm of spirit comes through the relationship in Christ established by the Spirit's residing within and possessing us.

The Law of Faith

The word *faith* means an act of trust in, or commitment to, God for some specifically revealed intention. It always involves first hearing, that is, it is based on the declared will of God. The *prayer of faith* of the elders⁵ for healing was not a psychological intensity of belief in God's goodness but a prayer based upon the revealed will of God in the specific case in hand. The sword which the Spirit uses to overcome "*the flaming arrows of the evil one*"⁶ is an utterance of God — something specific for each occasion. This is why it is vital to be praying at all times *in the Spirit*. To ask in faith⁷ is only possible for the one who hears.

The Law of Agreement

Basic for effective creative prayer is unity. *“If two of you on earth agree”*,⁸ if two voice together, utter the same prayer, then unitedly, their prayers will be granted. If husband and wife are not united, their prayers are hindered.⁹ It is the same Spirit who operates all the charismata,¹⁰ so that they supplement each other. For dynamic prayer to accomplish its goal we need to *“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”*, for *“there is one body and one Spirit”*.¹¹ It was in united prayer that the Spirit initiated the first gentile missionary outreach with the words: *“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul”*.¹² Paul writing to the Galatians stressed the necessity of unity of action: *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us walk along together under the control of the Spirit”*.¹³

The Law of Love

“Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”.¹⁴ This freedom is from self-centred living. It is freedom to love. Paul appealed to the Roman Christians to wrestle with him in prayer to God on his behalf *“by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit”*.¹⁵

Agape love is not mere sentiment, nor only an attitude, but is a force for good emanating from the believer’s heart. Love is self-giving, not merely to a cause, but to a person. By prayer, *agape*-love, engendered by the Spirit, becomes that divinely infused human force used by God to achieve Spirit-directed victories in the battles with evil. God chose to make Himself dependent upon this human availability impregnated with Spirit power. Jude urges us to keep ourselves in the love of God, that is, enjoy God’s self-giving to the full in three complementary ways: living in the realities of the christian faith, praying in and by the Holy Spirit, and anticipating the Lord’s mercy, the goal of which is eternal life.¹⁶ God’s love, revealed in Christ coming and dying for the world, is exhibited also in a divine ministry of the Spirit of love directed towards winning the world.

The Law of Constancy

Paul assured the Galatians that in due time they would reap if they did not lose heart.¹⁷ Great persistency is needed. Prayer must be importunate, that is, refuse to give in to evil,¹⁸ but press Christ’s victory to the limits in every

situation. It is the Spirit who produces the result, however. So Paul urged the Thessalonians to pray without giving in,¹⁹ and in Romans 12:12; Ephesians 3:18, and Colossians 4:2 he advises his hearers to keep on and on with praying with great perseverance. As *agape*-love never quits, so prayer in the Spirit never gives up.²⁰ The words of Jesus are made true by the Spirit: “*He who is an asker receives, he who is a seeker finds, and to him who knows, it is always opened*”.²¹

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

“Askers” – Jesus urges us to be “askers”. How does your prayer measure up in this list of spiritual laws by which God invites us to be part of His work in the world? Are you praying in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests?

PRAYER

With your disciples, Lord, we ask you to teach us to pray in the Spirit. There have been times when we have known your Spirit yearning within us. Give us the faith, obedient hearts and joy that accompany this experience much more of the time. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Praying in the Spirit*, No. 11 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² John 14:13.

³ John 15:7.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 2:11.

⁵ James 5: 14.

⁶ Ephesians 6:16.

⁷ Matthew 21:22.

⁸ Matthew 18:19.

⁹ 1 Peter 3:7.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:4.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:3-4.

¹² Acts 13:2.

¹³ Galatians 5:25 [Gibson paraphrase].

¹⁴ Romans 8:1-2.

¹⁵ Romans 15:30.

¹⁶ Jude 20-21.

¹⁷ Galatians 6:9.

¹⁸ Luke 18:1.

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:8.

²¹ Luke 11:10 [Gibson paraphrase].

12

LIVING POWERFULLY BY
THE SPIRIT¹

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power through his Spirit** in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have **power**, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his **power** that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 3:14-21

Power for Living

We are attracted to demonstrations of power or excellence. Our sporting heroes are expected to excel and we like our politicians to have great personalities too and to lead. We even sit at the feet of eloquent preachers! So when we emphasise the power of the Spirit we are talking of His ability to achieve in us far beyond normal natural and human levels of power and influence. This supernatural ability is what is meant by the biblical idea of *power* or *might*. In the Old Testament the word is *gebhurah*; its New Testament equivalent is *dunamis* (as in dynamite).

Power in the Name

In the Old Testament the word *might* is sometimes substituted for God's proper name. The person of God expressed in the *Name* has all these great attributes: He is lord and sovereign over all people, having created all things. His sovereignty has always been and will always be exercised. Our Lord said to the Jewish leaders: "*I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the **mighty one** (dunamis) and coming on the clouds of heaven*".² Later Peter speaking to these leaders gave the *Name*, Jesus Christ the Nazarene, as the One by whose might the lame man was healed.³ That same day the young church asked God for boldness to speak in the *Name* attested by a display of great power and grace. God answered by filling them with His Holy Spirit.⁴ The power of the Spirit is released in us through our full identification with Jesus — His message, His purposes, and His glory.

Power for Ministry

Paul remarks that the ministry of the Spirit comes with glory, that is, in a display of God's character and might.⁵ In both Testaments the Spirit is the source of this power. A number of expressions are used to indicate this: the Spirit came upon Saul;⁶ the apostles;⁷ and the Ephesian disciples⁸ for a specific ministry. It was for continuous ministry the Spirit was upon Moses,⁹ Simeon,¹⁰ Jesus,¹¹ and rested on Elisha,¹² Moses' elders,¹³ and persecuted Christians.¹⁴ For overall ministry the Spirit would be placed on the Messiah¹⁵ and for a sudden specific unexpected ministry the Spirit fell on Ezekiel,¹⁶ as well as Cornelius' household.¹⁷ Moreover, in all 14 references to being "*filled with the Spirit*" in Luke and Acts, the subject is *ministry*. It is the language of power and control, and means being completely under the control of the Spirit.

Every Christian, through grace, is given a share in the ministry of Christ's church.¹⁸ In discussing various facets of this church ministry, Paul refers to these ministries under three titles: varieties of charismata, varieties of ministries, and varieties of energizing.¹⁹ So these same functions in the church's fellowship and task can be looked at from three standpoints — that of the Spirit, of our Lord, and of God the Father. Yet it is the Spirit who operates them all with the purpose of building up the church.²⁰ These specific

ministry aspects are never isolated from their function within Christ's. To ask: "What is my gift?" as if it is a personal possession is to miss the point. We are always meant to discover our charisma or ministry with great wonder and awe within the church's fellowship.²¹ Furthermore, the ministry in relation to the outsider is also always to be in the power of the Spirit.²² For this task the Spirit gives boldness, power, love and sound judgment.²³

Personal Power

The words *power* or *might* in the biblical sense always include outward display but the display is not pre-eminently of a physical kind. The coming upon Mary by the Spirit, is also described as the "*power of the Most High*" overshadowing her.²⁴ In Christ's transfiguration the Kingdom would be seen to "*come with power*",²⁵ that is, not merely in the outward demonstration of light, but in God's speaking to the disciples and in the discussion with Moses and Elijah about Calvary.²⁶ God's power is also frequently mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with justice, righteousness, grace and faithfulness. These are related to the Spirit's activity as seen through the Messiah, God's Branch.²⁷ This same Messiah was anointed by the Holy Spirit and *power* for His earthly ministry²⁸ and is now enthroned above.

Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 3

In his prayer for the Ephesian converts Paul asks God to enable them to understand the Christian faith fully so that they experience Christ's love completely and share in God's *power* within. Again in Chapters 4 and 5 Paul enlarges on this theme of Christ's *fullness* which is ours for both character and ministry.²⁹ Thus, we grieve the Spirit when we do not allow Him to reproduce in us the loveliness of Christ as exact copies of God.³⁰ It is the Spirit who fulfils in us the yearnings of our hearts – a fulfilment not reached by bitterness of spirit or immoral practices nor (we could add for today) by any high through drugs but through the Spirit alone³¹ who both negates the egotistical expression of the sinful self and also fulfils in His church those personal qualities fitting for her as Christ's Bride. This fulfilment of heart and character also includes ultimately the Spirit's transforming of our mortal bodies into the likeness of Christ's.³² Then all the yearnings of our mortality will, by the Spirit, be swallowed up in life as God originally intended it.³³

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

We want power for living but often we look for the wrong kind or in the wrong place and for our own benefit. Yet God can do far beyond what we even dare to ask for. With Paul, pray for yourself and your church, this fullness, this more than enough, which is found in Christ through the Spirit.

PRAYER

God of power, we ask for your power to be ours for living, for ministry and for witness. Energise us through your Spirit so that as we live in your love, we will be channels of your love and power to others. We dare to believe that you will astound us with your answer to this prayer for boldness through a filling with your Spirit. AMEN.

¹ First published as *Living Powerfully by the Spirit*, No. 12 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.

² Matthew 26:64.

³ Acts 4:7-10.

⁴ Acts 4:24-33.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:8, Exodus 34:6.

⁶ 1 Samuel 10:6.

⁷ Acts 1:8.

⁸ Acts 19:6.

⁹ Numbers 11:17.

¹⁰ Luke 2:25.

¹¹ Luke 4:18.

¹² 2 Kings 2:25.

¹³ Numbers 11:25.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 4:14.

¹⁵ Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 12:18.

¹⁶ Ezekiel 11:5.

¹⁷ Acts 10:44.

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:7,12.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:12.

²¹ Acts 2:42.

²² Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13,19.

²³ 2 Timothy 1:7.

²⁴ Luke 1:35.

²⁵ Mark 9:1.

²⁶ Luke 9:31.

²⁷ Isaiah 11:2, Jeremiah 23:5.

²⁸ Acts 10:38.

²⁹ Ephesians 4:13.

³⁰ Ephesians 4:30.

³¹ Ephesians 5:18.

³² Romans 8:11.

³³ 2 Corinthians 5:4-5

13

BEARING THE FRUIT OF
THE SPIRIT¹

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. . . .

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5:19-23

Reaping what we sow

As a conclusion and summary of these past 12 days of life in the Spirit, we look today at the harvest of our sowing, because we reap what we sow. Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies it is not fruitful, said our Master.² One plants, another waters, God gives the increase.³ But our failure to plant and water can mean no increase. True, the life is in the seed, but the environment needs to be congenial for germination and growth and we have responsibility for that.

Following the farming analogy, if we sow to the Spirit we can expect the fruit of the Spirit to be evident.⁴ The kind of fruit we can expect Paul lists in Galatians 5 under nine headings, and these fall into three categories. The list, however, is not meant to be exhaustive but is given in contrast to the works of fallen humanity stated in the preceding verses.

Foundational Fruit – Love, Joy, Peace

The world was created in *love*. Our redemption was planned in love. Our destinies are directed in love. Love is the basis and fulfilment of it all. But *agape* love in the New Testament is not preeminently an emotion. It is the free self-giving of God to those He has created and redeemed by His sharing His future with us. Love chooses and gives totally to the object of its choice. Love holds back nothing. The love of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁵ This makes us the recipients of all that God in love chooses to do *and* it makes us a channel through which that love can reach out to others. We are to feed our enemies not kick them! Receiving and giving love are intertwined but we need to make ourselves available to God for the Spirit to produce such love in us. It cannot be generated by our own humanity.

The exercise of love has two accompanying emotions — *joy* and *peace*. Joy is the by-product of obedience. Seek happiness and you miss it; seek to please God and it appears. Joy is the undercurrent of life persisting in every changing situation because we are aware that “I am His and His desire is toward me”.⁶ *Peace* for the Christian *begins* with the reality of our sins forgiven — that we have been accepted in the Beloved.⁷ But the peace of God *continues* as we live fully aware of God’s sovereignty — I’m letting Him take full control of my life and service.⁸ In a stormy world of tensions on many personal fronts we need our imagination quickened to visualise the Sovereign Lord in full control.⁹

Fruit for Others – Patience, Kindness, Goodness

Moses said to the Lord: “Show me your glory”¹⁰ The Lord’s reply was that He would let His goodness pass before Moses and when He did the next day, what Moses heard (rather than saw) was God declaring His Name and His outstanding character towards Moses’ needy and sinful people. The first three of the five aspects of God’s character shown to Moses were “compassionate and gracious and slow to anger”.¹¹ Paul’s statement is an echo of this triad but in reverse order.¹² Obviously as God was so patient with the Hebrews, so should Moses, and so should we! *Patience* makes allowances for weakness in others. God is not in a hurry to condemn. Love is both patient and kind.¹³

God's *kindness* is shown in His compassion. The Greek word translated *goodness* here occurs only in Romans 15:14, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. It is equivalent to *generosity* or *beneficence*. It answers to the Hebrew word of Exodus 34:6 – *compassionate* or *bestowing favours*. Frequently in the Old Testament you come across the expression, *found favour*. This is emphasizing how delightful it is to grant a favour spontaneously or even on request. Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.¹⁴ It is what we grant to or benefit others by when we are under no legal or moral obligation to do so. The idea of compassion is not simply *pity*. It is a spontaneous feeling flowing over into action. A Christian is one who cares for the plight of others and takes steps to alleviate it. A generous heart is the Spirit's fruit in our life.

Fruit for the Work of God – Faith, Meekness, Self-Control

Many modern translations such as the New International Version (used above) translate these three as *faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. It seems to me, however, that this triad has to do with the advancement of the kingdom. **Faith** as a fruit of the Spirit enables us to see the purposes of God and lay hold of them so they are fulfilled. This kind of faith is one of the grace gifts (*charismata*)¹⁵, not faith for salvation. The word **meekness** is used of both Moses¹⁶ and of our Lord.¹⁷ Meekness is submissiveness, the opposite of arrogance or self-superiority. This meekness is firstly directed towards God but then as a consequence, towards other people. It involves living in relationship with others as under the control of God.¹⁸ The idea of **self-control** is the inner aspect of meekness. The word only occurs at Acts 24:35, Galatians 5:23 and 2 Peter 1:6. It is my attitude when I say continually, "*Not my will but yours be done.*" It is living in full mastery of my humanness, physically and otherwise, thus enabling me to respond immediately with gladness to Christ's call at any time or place. In denying self and taking up the cross we are ready to follow the Lord wherever He goes.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

If you are aware that the Spirit's fruit in you is sparse, let me suggest that for the next nine weeks you practise the art of growing in the Spirit. We are responsible for fostering an environment suitable for the Spirit to bear this fruit. Take a week to practise love, then the second week practise peace — right through to practising the whole nine. Turn over the soil, prune the vine, let the sap flow. Give glory to God for the fruit the Spirit is producing in you.

PRAYER

Father God, we want to reflect your glory through your fruit in our lives. Encourage us as we develop new habits of thought and action under the stimulus of your Spirit and may others also enjoy this new fruit you are creating. We thank you in anticipation. AMEN.

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- ¹ First published as *Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit*, No. 13 in a series called *Sowing to the Spirit*, by The Australian Baptist, 1984.
- ² John 12:24.
- ³ 1 Corinthians 3:6.
- ⁴ Galatians 6:7.
- ⁵ Romans 5:5.
- ⁶ Song of Songs 7:10, Philippians 4:4.
- ⁷ Ephesians 5:6, Romans 5:1.
- ⁸ Colossians 3:15, Romans 8:35.
- ⁹ Isaiah 26:3.
- ¹⁰ Exodus 33:18.
- ¹¹ Exodus 34:6.
- ¹² See also 2 Corinthians 6:6, Ephesians 5:9, Colossians 3:12.
- ¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:4.
- ¹⁴ Genesis 6:8.
- ¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:9, 13:13.
- ¹⁶ In Numbers 12:3.
- ¹⁷ Matthew 11:29 and 21:5.
- ¹⁸ Ephesians 5:21. See also Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:12 and Titus 3:2.

