

Holy Transformation

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Romans 10:9-10 state that if we confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives, and if we believe that God has raised him from the dead, then we are saved, we are born again. By God's grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we are redeemed from the penalty and the power, or influence of sin. We receive the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, by which we become partakers of the divine nature.

By God's grace we are saved. By His grace we are cared for in the present. And by His grace we shall ultimately be glorified. Salvation from start to finish is not of our own works, so that no one should boast. But we must never think that salvation by grace gives us a license to sin, to go on living as we did before we were saved. The apostle Paul responds to this kind of thinking in Romans chapter six [All scripture quotations are from the NKJV]:

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Grace is not a license to sin: it is a strong encouragement to live righteously. In the gospel of John, Jesus Christ has a woman brought before him accused of adultery. The hypocritical religious leaders want to know if Christ would have her stoned. The Lord suggests that those without any sin cast the first stone. One by one, they left. Alone with the woman, Jesus Christ said,

John 8:10-11

... "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

In an act full of grace, Jesus Christ forgave the woman. But then he commanded her to "go and sin no more." Forgiveness is not a license to go on sinning, but an opportunity to change for the better.

As Christians, born again of God's Spirit, we have been given the tremendous power and ability to sin no more. Yet, all too often I have found that when Christians talk about the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they tend to emphasize the seemingly spectacular: the revelations, speaking in tongues, the miracles. While all of these are very important aspects of the power of the Spirit in our lives, they are not the most vital. These manifestations of the power of the Spirit are not ends in themselves, but rather means to an end. They are for the edification and good of the church. The primary purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit is the reproduction of the very graciousness and holiness of our Father God in our own lives!

What the gift of the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not just make you a Christian in spite of any evidence. Rather it enables you to put forth real evidence of transformation. Look at how the apostle Paul pictures the change in the lives of the believers in the city of Corinth:

I Corinthians: 6:9-11

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Some of the members of the church of Corinth had come from "the bottom of the barrel," so to speak. But Paul said that they were now different. What happened to effect the change? They were washed, they were sanctified and they were justified in the name of the Lord and by the power of God's Spirit within them. Because of their relationship to Christ and the Spirit of God within, they were made new.

II Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The power of God can do what no therapist can do, what no government program can do, what no amount of money can do. It delivers people from the destructive power of the old sin nature and transforms lives for the better. The goal of the gospel is that we become more and more like the image of God in Christ that is within us.

II Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

With the Spirit of the Lord within us we are liberated from the dominion of sin in our lives. As we look into the Word of God, taking in the image of all God says we are and can do, just as we would take in our physical image in a mirror, we are then able to radiate back the image we see in the Word. The Spirit within us

enables us to be transformed more and more into the image of God, in Christ, in us. With the Word in our minds and the Spirit within our being, we can manifest the new man, which was created in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:17-24

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles [i.e. the unbelievers] walk, in the futility of their mind,

having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart;

who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

and be renewed in the spirit [or, life] of your mind,

and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Since we have been washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the power of God's Spirit, we should live differently. We have been redeemed from a futile existence. We have been given a new life, a new nature and this new nature within, is capable of righteous and holy living.

Ephesians 4:25-30

Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

nor give place to the devil.

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

These are all simple and direct commands. We are not to see a therapist about our lying, or our stealing, we are simply to stop! We are to control our anger and control our mouths. We are not to "grieve" the Spirit within. To "grieve" the Spirit is to place a heavy burden upon it. It is to bury it under the desires and actions of the "old man" nature. We are not to do this. Rather we need to give our new nature room to grow.

Ephesians 4:31-32

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The Christian is to put off the "old man" and grow up into all he is in Christ, and we grow up by imitating our Father. Sure! How do children learn what is acceptable behavior in life? They learn from their parents. In the same way, we learn what holy living is all about by imitating the actions of our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

To imitate God would be an incredible command, were it not for the fact that we have the gift of the Holy Spirit within us, our new nature. The natural man cannot imitate God, it is beyond his natural abilities. All of us as Christians are called to live a life so morally pure and so full of blazing love, that it could come from no other source than the gift of Holy Spirit. This is how we become witnesses for Christ. As Christ said in Acts 1,

Acts 1:8

"... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This verse doesn't say that we would do witnessing after we received the Holy Spirit, but that we would be witnesses! You can try to convince someone that a brick is really a tomato, but if it doesn't look like one, or taste like one, if it doesn't have all the characteristics of a tomato, then it isn't one. We can say that the gospel is the power of God to change lives, we can say that we are believers. But if we don't look like one and act like one, if we do not manifest the characteristics of a believer, then our testimony will never convince anyone! And

our life-style will bring disgrace upon the God of all grace and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we are told to stop living like the unredeemed.

Ephesians 5:3-10

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;

neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let not one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Therefore do not be partakers with them.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

finding out [or, proving] what is acceptable to the Lord.

The Spirit within us enables us to live lives full of goodness and righteousness, and truth. It enables us to live a life honoring God. Walking as children of light means revealing God's light, making known the truth of His Word in all we say and do. The believer has no business whatsoever living in darkness! When Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too were raised with him, to awake out of the spiritual death of sin and to walk in newness of life.

Ephesians 5:14-18

Therefore He says:

"Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, [my emphasis].

"Be filled with the Spirit" is God's command and He expects us to obey. But some might ask, "I thought we were already filled?" All of us have the Spirit of God dwelling within us, but we are not all filled.

The word "filled" is the Greek word pleroo and it means filled to capacity and thus having great influence upon that which it fills. The word is used in secular Greek for the wind which fills the sails of a ship causing it to move. Being filled with the Spirit means allowing the Spirit, the new nature, to inspire and motivate, and move us.

In verse 18, being filled with the Spirit is contrasted and compared to being drunk with wine. As a comparison, being drunk means being under the influence of alcohol. Being filled with the Spirit means being under the influence of the new nature. But being drunk is dissipation, leaving you out of control, while being filled with the Spirit actually gives you control of your life (Galatians 5:23 - "self-control"; II Timothy 1:7 - "sound mind").

When we are filled with the Spirit, when it permeates our personalities, we produce the fruit of the Spirit, rather than the works of the fallen flesh.

Galatians 5:16-23

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

idolatry, sorcery, hatred contentions jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law [my emphasis].

When we walk in the Spirit, when we are filled with the Spirit, we will produce the fruit of our new nature. And we walk in the Spirit, or we allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit, when we have our minds full of the Word of God. The mind full of the Word of God is the key to unleashing the power of the Spirit which transforms us (Romans 12:1-2; II Corinthians 3:17-18).

The primary goal of God in giving us His Spirit is our holy transformation. He desires for us to manifest the qualities of our new nature for His glory and our own good. The victorious Christian life is a life no longer bound to the destructive influences of sin. The victorious Christian life is a transformed life where we live righteously, encouraging one another, loving one another (Ephesians 5:19ff), and bearing the beautiful fruit of the Spirit.

[This article is excerpted from a new book by Chuck LaMattina entitled *The Power of the Holy Spirit*. Information about this and other books, tapes, etc. by Chuck may be obtained by writing to: Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL. 60645].