

Sharing the Life of God

In these times together, we have been looking at what it means to be **in Christ**. The New Testament describes this as the very basic foundation of our new life in Jesus but it seems that many – perhaps most – of us have missed out for far too long. So I make no apology for homing in on Biblical truth. Truth is exciting and liberating. As the Lord Jesus himself said “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” (**John 8:32**)

Our spiritual experience and growth often follow precisely from our appreciation of what has been called ‘the finished work of Christ’ – his shed blood, his broken body, his burial, resurrection and ascension. These are historical facts, but their effectiveness in our lives depends on our response to them.

Many people that we meet know that Jesus died and rose again, but do not derive any benefit from those facts. They cannot say ‘he died for me’ because they have not seen that they have been included. The main problem is not usually a lack of belief; much more often a lack of a sense of need. Once we realise that we have a need, and then discover that our need has been met in Jesus, our chief concern is not a lack of belief. More likely to be a reluctance to commit ourselves!

Yes, as we have begun to see, there is much more to the good news of Jesus than the vital starting point of forgiveness. Probably most of us start there, finding the answer to our sense of failure in the love of a God who has spared no expense to reconcile us to himself . . .

. . . but then we discover that there is more to following the Lord Jesus than forgiveness. He wants to change our lives – to transform us to be the people that we were always supposed to be – and, to do that, he needs to make an end of our old life and start us off on a new life. “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*” (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)

And so we have begun to discover that our experience follows his ‘finished work’. We need forgiveness: His blood was shed – and we experience God’s forgiveness. We need release from the slavery of sin and failure: His body was broken – and we experience the breaking of the power of sin and failure in our lives. As we see this and want to ‘cement’ our commitment, we ask for baptism, a graphic portrayal of our own death and resurrection, following his death and resurrection.

But what about that resurrection? Are we experiencing it? Is it possible? And surely we can’t share the experience of his ascension, can we?

* * * * *

During all of his ministry and especially towards the end of it, the Lord Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, often slightly cryptically, so the disciples might not have realised exactly what he meant. There is little doubt that they understood a lot better after Pentecost! AND went on learning after that! Let’s look at what he said and, as we do, we shall see that there are two distinct aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit.

But before we get into those, it is important to know that **the Holy Spirit is a Person**. Not a thing, not some sort of benign influence, but God himself, in person. Our lack of appreciation of this fact is betrayed by the times we refer to him as ‘it’. How would you feel if I referred to your closest friend or partner as ‘it’ – ? May our eyes be opened to see that the Holy Spirit really is a person!

Jesus was clear about this. It was right at the heart of what he told the eleven in the upper room, the evening before his arrest. Perhaps we can understand better than they will have done at the time . . .

*“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him or know him, but you know him because he abides with you and **will be in you.**” (John 14:16-17)* What a staggering promise! They will know him because he already lives with them – Jesus himself – and will be in them.

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you . . . But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes of mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:7,13-15)

Paul is in no doubt, either: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, mirroring the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)* By the work of the Holy Spirit, we are being changed into the image of the Lord Jesus. How significant that he refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ ! (See also **Acts 5:9, 8:39**)

* * * * *

Jesus spells out clearly that the Holy Spirit could not be sent until he had gone away and, writing his account of Jesus’ life years later, John adds his comment from his own experience in **John 7:39**: *“ . . . for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

Peter on the day of Pentecost makes the same connection: *“Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this which you both see and hear . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:33,36)* The arrival of the poured-out Holy Spirit **proved** that Jesus had been exalted at the Father’s right hand.

So why is this important for us here and now?

We have seen that our forgiveness, the end of our old life and our release from slavery to sin, failure and legalism follow directly from the death of the Lord Jesus. When we take the bread and wine we are ‘proclaiming the Lord’s death’ by asserting our identification with it. (**1 Corinthians 11:26, 10:16**)

Our Father has joined us to the life of his Son (**1 Corinthians 1:30**), and this goes further than we may have realised. We are not only joined to his death, but also to his resurrection and glorification. The results for us are intimately linked with our experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We have already read that the Lord Jesus promised the disciples that *“he (the Holy Spirit) will be in you” (John 14:17)*, but then he also gives them another promise in **Acts 1:8** : *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*. Two quite distinct promises, two distinct aspects of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, which reflect the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Let’s look at the ‘resurrection’ aspect first . . .

In **Romans 6**, Paul is writing about the fact that our old life is dead and gone:– *“ . . . or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism in to death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (v.3-4)* Here is a promise of sharing in Jesus’ resurrection, not just after our physical death, raised from death when he returns, but **here and now** ! Baptism is a picture of death to the old life and it is also a picture

of resurrection to the new life. Read the whole passage, **v. 1-14**. Paul is very clearly writing about us knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives **now**.

We have already looked at parts of **Romans 8** together, especially when we saw that, by our inclusion in the death of Jesus, we are dead to the slavery of sin and failure and no longer bound by religious legalism. Those are the negative but necessary aspects of our being joined to Jesus, but the positive side is even better!

Paul writes it, but we have probably all experienced it: *"those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* (**v.8**). By 'in the flesh', he means just living a natural human life and most of us have tried to do all sorts of things to please God, doing our best to do the right things in the right ways and hoping that they might perhaps please him. But, in the end, we have to face the fact that, however hard we try, we cannot reach his standards. We fail – again!

But, says Paul, that is the negative side – our total inability to please God by our own efforts. The amazing positive comes in the next verses:

"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead through sin, yet the spirit is alive through righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." (**Romans 8:9-11**) Once again the link with Jesus' resurrection and the almost unbelievable statement that the Holy Spirit – God himself – makes his home in us! Have we allowed ourselves to become accustomed to this amazing fact? By his Holy Spirit living in us, we actually have a share in the life of God himself.

There is only one life that can possibly please God, and that is the life of his Son. Can we see this marvel of grace, that we have been made partakers of his life, his nature, his inheritance? Simply on the basis that 'by his doing' we are in Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:30 – again!**

Once again, we find our need met by what he has already done. We need a life that pleases God: Jesus has been raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit – and he has made us sharers in that resurrection and partakers of his nature!

So, the Holy Spirit living in us is a result of us being joined to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we have in us that same resurrection power, the life that truly pleases the Father. This is the true meaning of being 'born again' – a new life has taken root inside us!

Briefly, let's go back to **John 3**, where Jesus is talking with Nicodemus. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* (**v.5-6**)

Peter picks up the same theme in **1 Peter 1:3-4**: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again (literally 're-fathered us') into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance, imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in the heavens for you."*

And again in **2 Peter 1:3-4**: *"His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

Peter is describing what God has done and also the process by which our lives are progressively changed **from the inside**. All that we need for 'life and godliness' is already made over to us by his divine power but the way that we experience it is through really getting to know the Lord Jesus. He has given us promises (yes, they really are 'precious and magnificent'!) and as we take hold of those promises, we become sharers in the life and nature of the living God – WOW!

With this sort of process actually going on inside us by the Spirit of God, there is absolutely no need for us to try to please God. Does that sound wrong? How could we please him anyway? Only by allowing the implanted life of the Son of God to increase in us and bear its fruit!

Back to **John 15:1-11** again! *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit from itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Time after time in his letters to the churches, Paul emphasises the need for them (us!) to know more of what God has done for us in Jesus, but he knows that this does not come by just learning facts and filling our heads with them. He prays for them that they will know by revelation, in other words by the Holy Spirit opening up their eyes to see more and more . . .

“. . . making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe.” (**Ephesians 1:16-19**) See also **Colossians chapters 2 & 3**.

This process is continuous and ongoing, but it has an end in view. Here's the process: *“now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, mirroring the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”* (**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**)

And here is the end in view: *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is.”* (**1 John 3:2**) I like that word 'because'! We will become like Jesus when he returns, as the result of seeing him just as he is. In the meanwhile, as we gradually see more and more of him and what he has already accomplished for us, we are gradually being changed to be more like him.

So, once again, our ongoing spiritual development results from what Jesus has already done, and the route is our own response to the ongoing opening of our eyes to more and more. Once again, our need has already been met in the provision of our Father:

“By his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption . . .” (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

Paul was on the same course of development. He still had his 'L plates' on, even at the end of his life:

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” (**Philippians 3:12**. Read the whole passage, **v.7-14**)

* * * * *

If we have begun to see the reality of the fact that our life has been joined to the life of Jesus and that, through the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit now lives in us, then we need to respond as Paul did, by 'laying hold' of the revelation that we have received. The word means 'fully take to yourself', a very active sort of 'receiving'.

Dave Taylor December 2019

Further copies of these notes can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk