

CONFORMED TO CHRIST BY THE SPIRIT

- A. Introduction: As Christians we have within us the same power that raised Christ from the dead, the Holy Spirit. In this series we're talking about becoming aware of the fact that God is in us. We aren't talking about seeking a subjective experience where we "feel" God in us. We are talking about an objective reality.
1. The Bible clearly states that God the Holy Spirit dwells in us to empower and transform us. However, because we're talking about an Infinite God indwelling finite human beings, there's no way to explain the fact that God is in us to the point where we fully understand it.
    - a. God is One God who simultaneously manifests as three distinct (but not separate) Persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, where the Father is, so is the Son and the Holy Spirit.
    - b. The Bible uses numerous word pictures to give us insight into the nature of our relationship with God now that we are born of Him and baptized in His Spirit.
      1. It speaks of union with Christ and uses images that convey union and shared life: Vine and branch (John 15:15), Head and body (Eph 1:22,23). Husband and wife (Eph 5:31,32).
      2. The imagery used to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit depicts the fact that the He wants to saturate every part of our being: baptized (to dip or immerse, Acts 1:5), endued (to be clothed with power, Luke 24:49), and filled (to as much as can be held, Acts 2:4).
    - c. Even though God is in us by His Spirit He is still Omnipresent or present everywhere at once. This is beyond our comprehension. Our responsibility is to know it and believe. This is an objective fact which will affect our experience when we believe it.
  2. Last week we looked at the apostle Paul. He lived with the awareness that God in him made him equal to anything that came his way and he experienced definitive results.
    - a. His testimony was: Phil 4:13--I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me—I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me, [that is, I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency]. (Amp)
      1. Paul wrote that in the face of life's hardships we have a treasure in earthen vessels (II Cor 4:7). The point is not: We're so weak and unworthy. This is natural (or created) human ability infused with supernatural (or uncreated) power, Almighty God by His Spirit.
      2. Paul wrote: Col 2:9,10--For in Him (Jesus) the whole fullness of Deity (the Godhead), continues to dwell in bodily form—giving complete expression of the divine nature. And you are in Him, made full and have come to fullness of life—in Christ you too are filled with the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and reach full spiritual stature. (Amp)
    - b. Paul prayed for Christians that we would know the magnitude of the power in us and would live with the awareness that we are the temple of God. Eph 1:19,20; I Cor 6:19
      1. The Holy Spirit is the Performer of the Godhead. He is here to accomplish or make real in our lives and experience what the God the Father through the Lord Jesus provided at the Cross.
      2. We're working on becoming God-inside minded so that we can live in the light of this reality and experience in our lives the effects of God in us.
- B. The Holy Spirit is in us first and foremost to produce transformation that will restore us to our created purpose—sonship and conformity to the image of Christ. Eph 1:4,5; Rom 8:29,30
1. Paul understood this. Consider something he wrote to the church at Philippi while in jailed in Rome (AD 60-63). At the time he wrote he didn't know if he would see them again in this life because he was facing possible execution. In that context Paul made this statement:
    - a. Phil 3:10,11--[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply acquainted with Him...and that I may in the same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers]; and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope] that if possible I may attain to the [spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out

from among the dead [even while in the body]. (Amp)

b. There's a lot in his statement (more than we can address in one lesson). Certainly, he's expressing the hope that as he faced possible death by execution, he had the certainty that if killed, his body would be raised up by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. But there's more to it.

Paul wanted to see resurrection power working in him while he was alive.

1. Then he made it clear that his greatest aim was to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. He hadn't attained it yet. But he pressed on for all he could get in this life.

2. v12--He wanted to apprehend or lay hold of that for which he had been apprehended. We've been laid hold of by God to become sons and daughters conformed to the image of Christ.

A. v13--Paul said: I forget what is behind. He's referring to his previous religious ideas as a Pharisee and to his persecution of believers (v4-7).

B. v14--And he pressed toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ (sonship and conformity). The word translated pressed means to pursue and, by implication, to persecute. Paul used this same word in v6 (persecuting) and v12 (follow after).

3. With the same zeal he pursued believers before his conversion, he pursued conformity to the image of Christ—which he knew would be accomplished in him by resurrection power. This is the starting place for experiencing resurrection power in this life. We must hunger for it.

2. This was Paul's passion for those he led to Christ—that they'd be conformed to the image of Christ.

a. Gal 4:19--When this group of churches in the province of Galatia were affected by error (the idea that circumcision was necessary to maintain salvation) he wrote to them that he was laboring over them again in prayer: Until you take the shape of Christ (NEB); Until Christ is completely and permanently formed (molded) within you (Amp).

b. Eph 4:13--Paul wrote that this is why God gifts people (like himself) to proclaim the gospel and teach men the scriptures: that [we might arrive] at really mature manhood — the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ's own perfection — the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ, and the completeness found in Him. (Amp)

c. Col 1:28--Paul said that he poured his life out to reach men and women: That we (I) may present every person mature—full-grown, fully initiated, complete and perfect — in Christ, the Anointed One. (Amp)

3. Conformity to the image of Christ (or being made like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love) is a process that begins when we're born of the Spirit and will be completed in connection with the return of Jesus. Each point below is a topic for an entire lesson. But consider these brief thoughts.

a. When we believe on Jesus the Holy Spirit regenerates our dead human spirit and we are born of God. Our inner being (our spirit) is glorified or conformed to the image of Christ and we become new creatures through union with Christ. This inward transformation becomes the basis of our identity: We're sons of God and He is our Father. Rom 8:30; II Cor 5:17,18; I John 4:17

b. When Jesus comes again the bodies of all who believe on Him will be glorified (or made like His resurrected body) by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies will be made incorruptible and immortal (permanently beyond the touch of corruption and death). Phil 3:20,21; I Cor 15:51-53; I Thess 4:13-18

c. Now, in this life, our thoughts, emotions, words, and actions are supposed to become increasingly Christ-like as we take on outwardly the effect of the inward change. This is an oncoming process.

1. This ongoing transformation is accomplished in us by the Spirit of God together with the Word of God. II Cor 3:18--And all of us, as with unveiled faces [because we] continue to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit. (Amp)

2. How much transformation takes place in this life depends in large part on how much we cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

4. Eph 6:17--Paul referred to the Word of God as the specific instrument used by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, through the Bible, builds us up into the image of Christ in our mind, emotions, and body.
- a. The Holy Spirit, through the written Word of God, reveals the Living Word of God, Jesus, to us. He gives us understanding of what we read. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. God's Word is truth. John 16:13,14; John 17:17
    1. The Word of God functions as a mirror. It shows us the inward changes that have already occurred because we're born of God. And it shows us what we're supposed to be and what we're becoming, with specific instructions on how to behave.
    2. Then we, by the power of the Spirit of God in us bring an end to unChristlike thoughts, words, and actions. Rom 8:13
    3. This is natural (or created) human ability infused with supernatural (or uncreated) power. We exercise our will and take appropriate actions to put into practice what we read (natural) and the Holy Spirit in us provides the power (supernatural).
  - b. Obviously, all that we're saying presumes that you understand your number one responsibility as a son or daughter of God is to becoming increasingly Christlike. It presumes that you're re looking into the mirror of the Word on a regular basis. And, it presumes that you, like Paul, are pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God.
5. Eph 6:18--After Paul pointed out that the Word of God is the Holy Spirit's particular instrument, he instructed believers to pray in the Spirit.
- a. We've discussed in previous lessons that when Paul used the phrase "praying in the Spirit" he meant praying in other tongues (I Cor 14:14,15). We've also discussed the fact that praying in other tongues edifies us or helps build us up into the image of Christ (I Cor 14:4).
  - b. Space doesn't permit a repeat of all that we've already said. But consider this point. All of us have issues in our soul (character issues) that are unChristlike.
    1. We're well aware of some of them. But others, we don't even see. When they're pointed out we defend them because we believe we have good reasons for our thoughts and actions.
    2. Matt 26:31-35--Remember Peter? He had some big character flaws--pride and lack of commitment when things got rough. Jesus revealed it to him, but Peter vigorously rejected His insight.
      - A. Rom 8:26--The Holy Spirit is in us to help us to pray about these infirmities. When we pray in tongues we're praying in a language we don't understand. We do the speaking (natural) but the Holy Spirit in our spirit is the source of the words (supernatural).
      - B. He helps us pray effective prayers regarding our unChristlike traits. He is able to help us pray about issues we don't see and issues we would argue with God about as did Peter.
  - c. We've stated this point in a previous lesson. But it bears repeating. Some say tongues ceased when the last apostle died. However, the Bible says nothing like that. And, the need for conformity to the image of Christ has not come to an end. Praying in other tongues will come to an end when God's plan of redemption is completed and we are all fully conformed to the image of Christ. I Cor 13:8-13
- C. Conclusion: I realize that lessons like this don't seem practical. All of us face real problems and talking about conformity to the image of Christ seems unrelated to them. Consider these thoughts.
1. Many Christians are very concerned about God's will and being in the will of God. God's primary will for you is that you be conformed to the image of Christ. He's much more interested in you becoming like Jesus than where you work or what car you buy.
    - a. I John 2:6--The standard for Christian behavior is: Walk even as Jesus walked. The Holy Spirit is in us to help us become increasingly Christlike. Every one of these verses instructs us to do something even as Jesus does it. John 13:34; Rom 15:2,3; Eph 5:1,2; Col 3:13; I John 3:3
    - b. I John 3:3 immediately follows I John 3:2 which tells us that we're finished works in progress:

fully God's sons but not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ. But He who has begun a good work in us will complete it (Phil 1:6).

1. Knowledge of your ultimate destiny is a source of hope that will have a purifying effect on you. You recognize there is a process underway that will be completed. While it is underway, you stand in Jesus. God deals with you on the basis of the part that is finished because He knows it will be completed. When you see Him, you will be like Him.
  2. You clean up your act, not because you're a rule keeper, but because you understand that your destiny is to be like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love.
2. Increasing conformity to the image of Christ makes us better able to deal with life's challenges. Jesus said that we will have tribulation in this world, but we can be encouraged because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). There are entire lessons in that statement. But note two of them.
  - a. One, Jesus, in His humanity shows us what it looks like when a man indwelt by God lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. He overcame in every circumstance. John 14:10; Acts 10:38
    1. Jesus is our example of what sons of God look like in this world, what men and women born of the Spirit and baptized in the Spirit look like in action. He demonstrated what it looks like when men overcome in this life.
    2. Remember, Jesus is God become fully man without ceasing to be fully God. While on earth He put aside His rights and privileges as God and lived as a man in dependence on God His Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Two, through His sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus paid the price for sin making it possible for all who put faith in Him to become sons like Him.
    1. We are overcomers through the new birth. We overcome by the Greater One in us. I John 4:4
    2. Healing, patience, peace, victory over sin—those are all expressions of Christ being formed in us (in our soul and body) in this life.
3. I know I sound like a broken record, but it's vital that you become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. That means: Read it from start to finish over and over.
  - a. Don't jump around. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just read. Understanding comes with familiarity. (You can look up words and consult commentaries at another time.)
  - b. If you haven't been baptized in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues, seek it out. Find someone to lay hands on you as they did in the Book of Acts and yield to this second experience with the Holy Spirit. Then pray in tongues everyday.
4. The Spirit of God through the Word of God will work in you and increasingly conform you to the image of Christ. More next week!