

## SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

### New Creation

When the first man and woman were created, their heart, mind and emotions were set upon God. Though they had a free will, their will was directed towards being obedient to God's will. The Holy Spirit was within them to help them live a God-centered life. We have wandered far from this ideal and once the Holy Spirit comes into our life to spiritually restore us, we must be spiritually transformed back to the people we were created to be. We achieve this through a newly created spiritual life that is sourced from God and I have called this way of living the Christian Spiritual Life.

*The Christian Spiritual Life is the life lived by a believer who has received the Holy Spirit and is spiritually alive to God. It is a new spirit-led life in which the person's spirit, joined to the Holy Spirit, directs the person's life, renewing their mind and redirecting their emotions, resulting in a will that is increasingly yielded to God and a heart that is transformed so that the person lives an increasingly Christ-like life.*

A "believer", for the purpose of this definition, is a person who has been reconciled to God through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Some people talk about the miracle of salvation being the greatest miracle and I agree with this. What could be more amazing than God reconciling Himself to us, sending His Holy Spirit into us, and calling us His sons and daughters? However, there is a second amazing miracle. It is the fact that the Holy Spirit has not only come into every true believer and given us spiritual life but also that He now wants to lead us daily in a spiritual way and change us. If we allow Him, He wants to teach, help and guide each of us through our own spirit. Yet almost all Christians would be well acquainted with the first miracle but few know much about or have ever really tried taking hold of the second miracle although it is the purpose for the first taking place.

The first of these miracles results from our belief from our heart. The second of the miracles results from us recognizing the spiritual connection we have with God through the arrival of the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to do His work in our life. Living a spiritual life enables each of us to go to the depths of ourselves and commune at that level with God. It is at this level where we can transform our life first spiritually on the inside with the change then flowing through to our outward life. In this sense it is the highest form of living. Once reconciled to God, His desire is for each of us to see ourselves as newly created people, resurrected with Christ Jesus, forgetting our old selfish approach to living our life and now living a new life for God.

*2Corinthians5vs17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

We are called to become spiritual people and commit to a process of change towards becoming Christ-like. However, it is important to always keep in mind that although our spirit has been newly created, the transformation of our soul and heart will only

occur over time through our own daily commitment, diligence, effort, discipline and perseverance.

*2Corinthians4vs 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

From God's perspective, to restore what we lost, our soul and heart must be developed, transformed and shaped by our spirit, sourced from the Holy Spirit. Jesus talked of this massive change in terms of losing and gaining life.

*Matthew16vs24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, " If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

As new believers, Jesus said that the life we have been living, as far as God is concerned, has been useless for it has been lived in the world without Him, it is a fleshly life rather than a God-centered one. The ways in which we think, our passions, our desires and our feelings, have all been a result of a heart that to God is hard, wicked, dark and separated from Him. Jesus tells each person who chooses to follow Him and be a believer that each will have their own spiritual cross that must be carried. Through our own daily choices and through daily experiences that are placed in our path of life as a believer, more and more of our old life must be crucified and put to death so that our new spirit-centered life increasingly takes control. We exchange our sinful, selfish, broken life with all our weaknesses, bondages and sins for a new life that is given to us over time through the Holy Spirit working within us, putting it to death and progressively renewing our soul and transforming our heart. Through the daily denial of our self-centered life, we allow God's will to be accomplished in our life and become more like Christ Jesus.

The path that Jesus took to rise up to gain His place in heaven required Him to first be crucified and put to death on the cross. He says that if we love our old ways of living in this world we will lose our life for we cannot then take up the new spiritual life that God has for us. We must change and our willingness to give up the old life will determine how quickly we can take up all that God has for our life. Jesus states that any who still love the world and cannot leave it behind will not be able to leave their old life to live the new. We may gain all that this physical world has to offer our life but we will in the process lose our soul eternal life with God is lost.

When we lay down our old life our fleshly life is put to death with Christ, but even though this takes place, no Christian should ever think that being a Christian means relinquishing our human functions of thought, emotion or the application of our will. All are needed but they need to be renewed so that we can employ them in the way that ensures that we daily strengthen and mature our spiritual life and live as God desires us to. We no longer live for ourselves but we now live for God (2Corinthians5vs15) and we are people who choose to obey God while retaining our unique and valuable personalities.

God gave us a personality at birth but also free will to further create and form it over

the course of our life. Once we are reconciled to Him and are His children, He treasures the differences between our personalities. He has always wanted to establish a family for Himself made up of many different personalities, never wanting us to become mere puppets in His hand. Therefore, when we read in the Bible that the old fleshly life must be crucified (Galatians 5:24), Paul is talking about our world-centered life that has been formed through a sinful heart and life separated from God.

## **Spiritual People**

People with our limited boundaries of experience and knowledge cannot begin to see how the spiritual realm operates and the power that exists there. In fact, at times our restricted understanding and knowledge becomes a hindrance to operating in the spiritual realm as we should. What can be achieved in the spiritual realm is amazing and we start to gain an insight into this when we read that God created this amazing and complex universe by merely speaking it into existence. We also read of the many miracles that occurred in getting the nation of Israel to the Promised Land as well as those Jesus conducted during His ministry upon the earth. He healed diseases, made the blind to see, raised people from the dead, walked on water and caused storms to stop by His command. We are also told that God knows every thought that every person upon the earth thinks.

As we accept the spiritual realm and commit to living a life led by our spirit, we make a spiritual life the "natural life" rather than the reverse position that many of us find ourselves in. We start to believe the impossible because in God's spiritual realm the impossible becomes possible. Our life experiences form our values and hopes, and when we receive the Holy Spirit and learn from Him, we are able to cast aside our old life and limited ways of thinking and open up ourselves to living a new spiritual life where we now obtain our values and hopes from God. When we obey His leading and His will, the result will be a daily life lived according to what God values and wants.

If believers persist in learning with little or no reliance on the Holy Spirit to teach and reveal things to us, before long, the Christian life becomes dry and barren for there is no spiritual sustenance to nourish the spiritual life. Attendance at a weekly church service is very important for our spiritual development and to meet with other Christians but the Christian life cannot be lived based on a weekly diet of an hour or two of God and the rest of the week spent affected by the influences of the world and the self-focused life many tend to live.

Maturing in our spiritual life requires nourishing spiritual food and spiritual living water to develop. The food needed for spiritual growth comes through meditation on the word of God (the Bible), prayer, worship, and discovering God's will by the teaching of the Holy Spirit and obeying it. The water is the living water promised by Christ, which is the presence, power and help of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will only do within us the work that we want Him and allow Him to do. As water is essential daily to maintain our physical life, so the Holy Spirit within us is the spiritual water that our spiritual life must have to survive and strengthen. The

Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ living in us (Galatians2vs20) and we must yield to His influence daily so that God's will can be revealed to us and our life reflect the life that Jesus Christ lived.

Both spiritual food and water are required daily for spiritual life and it cannot survive if either one is not received and absorbed into our life. Our hunger and thirst must be for the things of the spirit rather than the things of the flesh. Anything, that is not sourced from a life lived in obedience to the Holy Spirit, is of the flesh and any part of our life that comes from the flesh cannot please God (Romans8vs8).

Like any worthwhile relationship, a relationship with God requires our daily time, focus, commitment and love. Leslie Weatherhead accurately identified the state of many people who may regularly attend church services but never really ever develop a daily spiritual relationship with God. Small doses of Christianity will never enable us to successfully live a strong Christian life.

*The trouble with some of us is that we have been inoculated with small doses of Christianity which keep us from catching the real thing.*<sup>15</sup>

To many, yielding to God's will is too high a price to pay. Yet the power to live the true Christian life comes only when we truly surrender our life to God and turn to following Him and loving Him with our whole heart. At this point of humility and submission, the Holy Spirit can start to teach us in our heart and guide our life. We find that in this deep relationship, when He tells us to do something we are positioned and inclined to do it, whether it be to give of our time or money, forgive people, love people or anything else we may need to do.

A believer must move from being a carnal or fleshly Christian to a spiritual Christian and until this happens, the person is tied to the flesh and the world around them. This is a gradual process and will take our lifetime, for no matter how long we live on this earth, there will be some portion of our carnal or fleshly self that is likely to remain. Even the most spiritually mature individual will find that there are times where they want to please themselves rather than God, live a fleshly life rather than a spirit-led one.

When we enter into living the Christian Spiritual Life we are fleshly or carnal people who are spiritually immature and Paul calls us babes in Christ.

*1Corinthians3vs1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*

God wants all Christians to progress past this stage of being babes in Christ to pursue spiritual maturity. Once saved, we must all appreciate the importance and necessity of living and maturing in our spiritual life.

Many of us hover at the edge of the spiritual growth that God wants for us and are unable to step into the spiritual realm. Having received spiritual life, we do not press on to develop the spiritual life due to our focus on achieving the change independent of our spirit. This seemed to have been the problem even with the early Christians.

*Galatians 3vs3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*

Too often spiritual development is substituted by applying our mind to studying the word of God and continuing to live our life with little if any significant changes. Many of us change little on the inside and even less in our actions and words. Although we may try to educate ourselves about living as a Christian, it is possible that all that we learn is mind knowledge and there is little spiritual growth because we are not fully committing our life to God in the way He wants us to nor do we allow the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work in our life. We expect the application of our mind, without regard for the intuitive revelation from the Holy Spirit, to develop our spiritual life and of course find it does not. We continue to ignore the Holy Spirit and stop Him from being able to instruct and guide us in our daily life. We must accept that God wants a deep spiritual relationship with His child that results in our transformation not merely a student who only seeks to learn about Him with their mind.

Listening and obeying the Holy Spirit provides the only way of growing spiritually and living up to God's desires for our daily life. If great care is not taken, our spiritual life may never leave the baby stage of spiritual growth and in some cases we become so entangled in the natural world again that we distance ourselves from God. The choice is ours for even though God desires a close relationship with us, if we choose not to separate ourselves from the world and lay down our old life we will not draw near to Him and not grow up spiritually. Although He will continue to convict us of our sin, the close relationship with Him will be lost.

Apart from simply never being taught about the spiritual requirements to live as a Christian, there are other reasons why we are not able to move on from our salvation experience and grow spiritually. Firstly, there are those who do not truly believe that the Holy Spirit is within. These people therefore feel distant from God and cannot come to terms with how they should spiritually interact with Him.

Secondly, there are those who have the faith to believe that the Holy Spirit is within and have some knowledge of how to spiritually mature but do not want to commit to the significant changes that are required to live the new life God wants them to. These people may believe that once they are saved through their belief in Jesus Christ there is no need to go on to significantly change their life. A lack of commitment and desire to live their life for God will mean that they are unable to transform their mind by turning away from their worldly influences, plans, desires and general busyness. They cannot leave aside their worldly affections and attachments and are held captive by sin, fully occupied and burdened by the issues of daily living. They do not ever reach a stage where they diligently pursue a closer spiritual relationship with God, living their daily life led by the Holy Spirit so that He can transform them. They are unable to become people who receive spiritual revelation and who delight to know and be obedient to God's will.

Thirdly, there are some that commit to living the new spiritual life and diligently seek the presence and teaching of the Holy Spirit but grow impatient with the apparent very slow progress in spiritually maturing. An impatient person can easily slide back

to the world where they can control things rather than trusting God and submitting to His control and timing. After living our life controlled by our soul rather than our spirit, we become used to and are comfortable with always using our physical body or mind to accomplish things. Naturally when we find the spiritual life difficult it becomes easy to fall back onto these methods to accomplish spiritual things. The result is us trying to take control of our spiritual growth by effectively ignoring our spirit and the Holy Spirit within us and this is foolishness. The fleshly person, that each of us is prior to being made spiritually alive to God, continually seeks to know and experience God through our senses. Yet, the spiritual cannot be known or experienced in this way. Paul tells us that the spirit works against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit. Therefore the only way to live the spiritual life God wants us to is to cast aside our fleshly way of living for God and take up a life led by the Holy Spirit. This means unlearning a lot of what we have learnt over the course of our life and taking up a new way of living.

We must recognize and accept that God has to be in control of our spiritual development. Our daily effort is required but we must also patiently learn to wait upon Him and walk with Him, not lagging behind or trying to run ahead. God is usually not in a rush because He recognizes the magnitude of the transformation that needs to take place in each of us and our weaknesses. He knows the best route and speed to take for a successful transformation and a transformation in heart and soul takes time.

In the pursuit of earthly things, wisdom and learning, we have disregarded our spiritual walk with God and in this way Paul says that we profess to be wise but instead have become fools. Those with heavenly wisdom and understanding seek reconciliation with God and His spiritual revelation so that they can live their life in a way that pleases Him and secure His eternal plans and promises. Earthly wisdom and earthly intelligence, in the spiritual realm, are of very little use for we are dealing with a completely new spiritual dimension.

Even though Moses was given the best education available at that time as a prince of Egypt, Moses had to set aside this great learning so that God could make him a spiritual person. To achieve this, God took Him into the wilderness where He had time to be transformed into someone God could use. The confidence that he had developed in himself and all that he could achieve in a material world had to be replaced with a humility and submission to a spiritual God. He had to learn to listen to and obey God.

Paul also was a man educated by some of the best scholars available at that time, yet the mind knowledge he possessed was of little use to God. Shortly after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he also went into the wilderness to have his learning put aside so that God could make him a spiritual person. To emphasize God's plans for him, even though he was a Jewish scholar, his ministry was to the Gentiles. Peter, who had been a simple fisherman, was sent to minister to the strongly religious Jews. This reversal of roles for the two central people of God's plan made each of them turn to God and depend on Him rather than their worldly learning to develop a spiritual life that could be used by God. Both these great men, one who had spent so much of his time studying the Scriptures of God and the other who spent his time listening to Jesus as His disciple, had both used their mind and experiences to come to

know God and obey Him. Now they had to learn how to listen to God's voice inside them through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The greatest motivating force for Christians to live the new spiritual life is not the prospect of eternal life or the other present day or eternal benefits, for as important as these are, they can get overshadowed by the cares and worries of our daily life or attractions of the world. It is the close relationship that we are able to build up with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through this relationship we build up our knowledge of Him and His will, and develop a strong love for Him that comes as we spend daily time with Him in prayer, meditation, worship and Bible reading.

The process of change is gradual and we must be patient, persevering with the daily changes that our new way of living requires. For most, casting off the old life is not easy and can only ever be possible by fully committing to the new life with all our heart and putting in the considerable effort required. Although in this physical life we will not shake off our old person entirely, God's will for His children is for us to be predominantly spiritual people who have a heart that is increasingly pure.

The importance of a pure heart cannot be overstated for without it we are in danger of having a heart that is divided, unbelieving and defiled. In this state, God cannot make use of us to complete His work and we are therefore likely to never know God's plan for our life let alone live it. A pure heart enables us to live with a pure mind and conscience but Paul tells us that a defiled mind and conscience are disqualified from God's good work for us upon this earth.

*Titus1vs15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

Heart-held faith in Jesus and our spiritual transformation becomes evident in new thoughts, emotions, words and actions. Given the pull of the world around us, all that it has to offer us (which appears attractive) and its influences, the only way to take up the new life and live it is to follow daily spiritual disciplines (discussed later) that will assist to establish new priorities and practices in our daily living.

When the believer takes up the newly created spiritual life and progress in it is pursued daily, I believe, as far as Jesus is concerned, that this amounts to the taking up of the new life that He taught about and leaving behind the old life. This is because our heart is now set upon living the new spirit-led life for God. Paul warns us that we must live a spirit-led life which means daily sowing to the spiritual life and undergoing a transformation. Our rewards from God will be determined by how we spend our life, whether we sow to the Spirit or continue to mainly sow to the flesh.

*Galatians6vs7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

**15. Leslie Weatherhead, 1893-1976, English Methodist minister.**

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