

God At Our Side

HOW THE LIVING GOD TRANSFORMS US

PART ONE: FILLED FULL OF GOD'S OWN LIFE

By Pastor David Fields
Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 5:18

I. The Goal: Until Christ is Formed in You

“For physical training is of some value but godliness has value for all things, holding promise both for this life and the life to come.”

1 Timothy 4:8

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you**, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”

Galatians 4:19-20

“It’s no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it. I can’t. And it’s no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it. I can’t.

Jesus could do it, I can't.

But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like his. And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like his. God's purpose is to make us like Christ, and God's way is to fill us with his Holy Spirit.¹

John Stott

Paul says: “Until Christ is formed in you.” (Gal. 4:19). How does that happen? Paul will go on to his primary point: “So I say, **walk by the Spirit** and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16); and, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us **keep in step with the Spirit**” (Gal 5:25).

Summit Drive Church: We exist to glorify God by developing caring, passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Growth. Life in God's Kingdom includes the dynamic process where God is continually forming and shaping us to reflect and resemble His own character, priorities and heart.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate {parakletos [par-ak'-lay-tos] παράκλητος – which could be translated: mediator, helper, intercessor, comforter, advocate} to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”

John 14:16-17a

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II. Trinitarian Grammar: Learning to Rightly Say “God”

“God is love.” – 1 John 4:16

God is loving. God is a relationship of Father, Son and Spirit; coequal, coeternal, sharing the same divine essence - yet distinct 'persons.'

The Early Church Fathers would speak of the Trinity in two ways:

- 1) God 'in se' (Latin), meaning 'God in God's own self' (also referred to as 'the Immanent Trinity'). We believe in one God; the co-equal, co-eternal godhead, who is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Then leave it as a 'mystery.'
- 2) God 'pro nobis' (Latin), meaning 'God for us,' or God's saving action in history, or 'God's economy of salvation' (also referred to as 'the Economic Trinity'). We can speak about how God does God's work with certain functions or 'operations' that we can attribute to each person of the Trinity.

“It is not wrong to differentiate between respective operations characteristic of each Person of the Trinity. But from an early date the Church Fathers, East and West, have firmly stressed that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity share jointly in the work of creation, redemption, sanctification, and resurrection.”²

III. Relating to God the Holy Spirit

A. The Spirit Speaks

In the New Testament there are several examples of the person of the Holy Spirit speaking. It is the Spirit who speaks to the seven churches in Revelation:

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
Revelation 2:7a

Several places in the New Testament the Spirit is attributed with speaking directly to people – to Philip, telling him to go and speak to the Ethiopian in Acts 8.

“The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”
Acts 8:29

When the Spirit spoke to Peter in Acts 10 about how he would be visited by three men.

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“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you.”

Any word any prophet ever spoke, was given by the Spirit (1 Peter 1:11-12). Every text of Scripture we have, that records the words of Jesus, is an act of the Holy Spirit giving wisdom and direction to the writers (2 Tim 3:16).

Even our ability to understand the Scriptures is an act of God's Spirit, illuminating the text, bringing it to light, bringing it home to our hearts, 'speaking' a fresh word of God to us, making real, to our situation and life in the moment, the ancient text He inspired to be written in the first place. The Spirit is speaking through the Scriptures.

The Spirit continues to speak to us personally, and corporately. Prophetic words are still a real thing. This calls for serious discernment. A word from God the Spirit will always be in line with what the Spirit inspired to be written in the Scriptures, and it will be confirmed by people indwelt by the Spirit. But, yes, God's Spirit is still speaking today. We have not Biblical or theological reason to think otherwise.

B. The Spirit and Prayer

We know for certain from the Bible that the Spirit enables us to pray.

“...The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.”
Romans 8:15b.

The Spirit enables us to pray to the Father with the confidence of little kids running up to their daddy.

The Spirit even prays for us: Romans 8:26b; “We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

The unifying document that helped give clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity, rooted in three hundred years of reflection on the Scriptures, is the final form of the Nicene Creed, in its final form from 381 AD. It says this of the Holy Spirit:

“And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord [meaning, one and the same as the one true God], the giver of life [like, the Creator God].

He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets."

-Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed 381 AD-

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Historical examples of prayer to the Holy Spirit:

“Breathe in me O Holy Spirit that my thoughts may all be holy; Act in me O Holy Spirit that my works, too, may be holy; Draw my heart O Holy Spirit that I love but what is holy; Strengthen me O Holy Spirit to defend what is holy; Guard me then O Holy Spirit that I always may be holy.”

– St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) –

“Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹¹

IV. Filled and Formed by the Spirit

Our question is just this: So how do we open ourselves to God's transformative power? How do we posture ourselves to experience his work of making us like Jesus?

To begin, we need to:

A. Be aware of the Counter-Discipleship, the Cross-Pressures we live with every day.

The question is never: 'Are you being formed? Are you being discipled?' The question is always, 'Who are you being formed by? Whose disciple are you becoming?'

“Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!”

Galatian 1:7b-8

- i. You get to choose what you put in front of your face. Who you give your attention to. You get to choose who you spend your time with – people and books and media. Not every book is a good book. Not every podcaster knows what they're talking about.
- ii. Be deeply connected to a local church that's seeking to be faithful to the Living God. The Church is not just a bonus, or add-on to the Christian life for those who want a bit more connection. It's central to what God does in saving us.

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Biblical scholar Gordon Fee talks about Paul's view of salvation like this: "To "get saved" from his [Paul's] perspective means to be joined to the people of God by the Spirit; and to "be saved" means "to live the life of a saved person."³

B. Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

The Christian life begins by a work of God the Holy Spirit and continues by the ongoing work of the Spirit – by the ‘brilliance’ and presence of Jesus in us. Look at this command Paul gives in Ephesians 5:18:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
Ephesians 5:18

Every believer already has the Holy Spirit indwelling their life when they trust Jesus. So why would Paul, writing to Christians, give this instruction to be, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” if we already have the Spirit?

As Paul says in Ephesians 1:13: "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit..."

“The overriding concern for Paul is that believers are fully influenced by the Spirit so that their actions are worthy of the Lord.”⁴

Paul is saying: 'Be filled with the very life of the Living God! Let the presence of the Living God be the central influence of your life; to change you, shape how you live!'

As Gordon Fee states: "For Paul, life in the Spirit begins at conversion: at the same time that experience is both dynamic and renewable."³

Dynamic – our experience of the Spirit is subject to shifts. We need to ‘keep in step with the Spirit’ as Paul says in Galatians, because it’s very possible not to be.

Renewable – we can be open to experience more and more of God’s empowering presence. Or not. Or we can act in ways that suggest we do not want God’s work to deepen in us.

Be filled full, all of you – every area – with the power and influence of God’s own life in you. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let the life of God, fill fully, your life.” But how?

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i. Confession

To acknowledge anywhere that you've been doing life with 'you' at the centre – ignoring God's ways. Unconfessed sin is going to be a block to your spiritual vitality. It just does. So we regularly pray like the Psalmist: "*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*" – Psalm 139:23-24

ii. Regularly ask God for the Spirit's filling and power

There is a place to pray something to the effect of, well, what St. Augustine did: "Breathe in me O Holy Spirit...Act in me....Draw my heart...Strengthen me...Guard me..." He invited the Holy Spirit to have full reign in every area of his life.

Or, as John Stott prayed: “Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”¹

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ENDNOTES

1. Stott, John. (7 Sept 2017). Basic Christianity. Eerdmans.
2. Thiselton, Anthony C. (01 June 2013). The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, Through the Centuries, and Today. Eerdmans.
3. Fee, Gordon D. (01 June 2009). God's Empowering Presence; The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul. Baker Academic.
4. Cohick, Lynn H. (05 Nov 2020). The Letter to the Ephesians (New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT)). Eerdmans.



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Our Side
DISCUSSION

Series Intro: Each year, we begin by focusing on one of our core commitments as a church, and this year we are looking at spiritual growth, or spiritual formation. This series is all about how God is at work to form and shape us to become more and more like Jesus. This process is often called 'sanctification' – which means 'to be set apart' to be 'made holy' – and is typically attributed to a work of God the Holy Spirit. As we see in the message this week, there is a willingness to be open to the Spirit's transformative work – to 'posture ourselves' in such a way as to tap into what the Spirit wants to do; like setting your sail on a boat to catch the power of the wind.

Open Up: If there has been one or two people who have had the greatest impact on your spiritual development and growth who would they be and why?

Dig In

1. Take some time to look at the text from Galatians 4: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" – Galatians 4:19-20.
 - a. What do you imagine a person who has had Christ "formed in them" would be like? (See Galatians 5:19-26 for some possible ideas to discuss).
 - b. What would a community with Christ formed in them – corporately – be like?
2. In your view, what are the primary influences – the things that shape how they live and the values they hold – for most people in our city?
 - a. How does that differ for believers? How ought it to differ for believers?
 - b. What about you? What are the main things that shape how you think and live on a daily basis? Put differently, what do you give most of your attention to?
3. Read Ephesians 5:18. Paul offers two commands. What we avoid – being intoxicated with wine, as one example of many that would form us away from God's ways. And the alternative influence: "Be filled with the Holy Spirit." Note what results from this kind of "God-filled life" in the following verses. (vv.19-21).
 - a. On a scale of 1-10, how open are you, at this time, to having God's life fill your life?
 - b. In the message, we looked at the idea of confessing areas we have resisted God's leading, and praying for God's Spirit to come and fill us on a daily basis. Would you make a similar prayer to John Stott's your daily prayer?

"Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Prayer: Take some time to give thanks for God's Spirit, and invite the Holy Spirit to fill and form us as a community. Bring any concerns of the community to God.