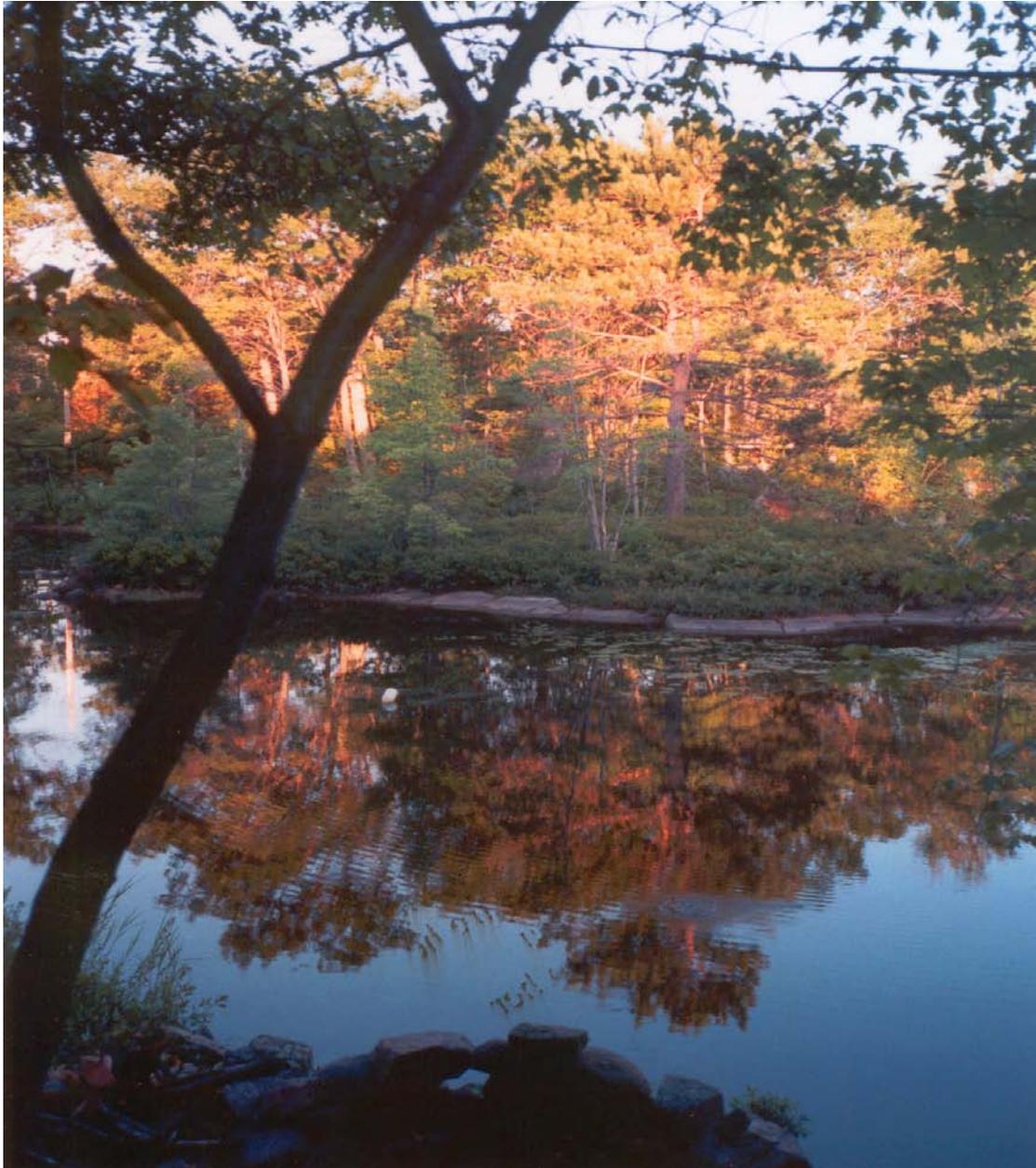


LIVING BEYOND THE RULES



**"BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE ... AGAINST SUCH THINGS THERE IS NO LAW."
(GALATIANS 5:22 – 23)**

© 2011 by Phil Stott, kindlingministries.com.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® .NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover photo: Cottage on lake at Kashabog, Lake Ontario, © Mark Walls, c/o CrossDaily.com.

WEEK 4: Bearing Fruit to God

Mature discipleship is all about fruitfulness – being in a close relationship of intimacy with Jesus Christ, and thereby being gradually transformed into his image through the working of his love, grace, and power.

Having dispensed with the false reliance on “keeping the rules” as a pathway to spiritual maturity, we will meditate this week on the New Testament concept of growing to maturity in Christ.

**WEEK 4 / DAY 1: -****The law of the Spirit of life**

MAIN TEXT: Rom. 8:1 – 4.

We all want to be fruitful in our life of faith – but how do we ensure that we will be fruitful?

In today's passage, Paul talks about a principle of fruitfulness, which he calls the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (v2a), which he asserts "(has) set me free from the law of sin and death" (v2b). It is clear from context that "the law of sin and death" is the rule-based approach to faith we have been discussing in earlier weeks – the 7th chapter of Romans makes this clear – but what is this "law of the Spirit of life" that has replaced it? How do we submit to this law, and become fruitful believers?

One thing is absolutely clear from the studies we have already done – it must be a "law" totally unlike the law-based approach to life that has dominated the church over the centuries. Why do I say this? Firstly, on practical grounds – the history of the church unfortunately proves that the majority of its members have not been teeming with godly fruit. And secondly, on scriptural grounds – for all of our studies so far have proven to us beyond a doubt that the salvation God desires does not come through the law.

When we discussed Eph. 2:8, we articulated a principle – that the whole of "salvation", from the day we first accepted Jesus to the day he returns in glory, is "by grace, through faith" – that is, it is a free gift of God, mediated through his divine power, and not something that depends upon our own merit or good works. This principle, therefore, must undergird this "law of the Spirit of life" – it is a law of grace, not a law of merit; a law of what God wants to do, rather than a law of what we have to do.

We must therefore expect "the law of the Spirit of life" to be something radically different from what we might have expected. If you are someone that has never heard of such a thing; if you are someone who, until these studies, thought that the Christian life was basically a matter of "keeping the rules", then I challenge you, I urge you, to allow God to radically reshape your thinking.

In the first week of our meditations, we quoted Mk 2:18 – 22, where Jesus talked about the futility of pouring new wine into old wineskins. We have already affirmed that the gospel is "new wine" – that is, it is radically different in nature to the "old wine" of the law-based approach to life. But this "new wine" will be ineffective if we pour it into "old wineskins" – that is, if we attempt to apply it to our lives without radically changing and rethinking the way we are to live.

And so, let's commit ourselves before God to a radical reorientation of our lives. We have a radical gospel – the most revolutionary message that has ever been preached on this earth. Are we prepared to be the radical revolutionaries (spiritually, that is) necessary to do justice to such a wonderful, glorious message?

- **QUESTION TO PONDER:** *How well do I understand "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"?*
- **FURTHER READINGS:** *Joel 2:19 – 32; Mt. 11:7 – 15; Jn 3:1 – 8; Ac. 17:1 – 9.*
- **MEDITATION:** *I choose to become a new wineskin.*



WEEK 4 / DAY 2: -

The Spirit is a gift

MAIN TEXT: Ac. 1:1 – 8.

The “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is concerned with the working of the Spirit of God in our lives, so we need to spend a few days looking at the role God has for the Spirit in the life of a believer.

In today’s passage, which comes right at the beginning of the book of Acts, we learn that fundamentally the Spirit is a gift (v4). This means that you do not need to earn it, but you do need to receive it. This, of course, is consistent with what we learnt at the start of these studies, that our salvation, from beginning to end, is a work of God’s grace.

Not only is the Spirit *a* gift, but it is also described as *the* gift – *the* gift of *the* Father (v4). There is only one God – the Father; and he has pre-eminently only one gift for those who follow Jesus – the Spirit. Only one gift, because only one gift is necessary – for the Spirit, being the very presence and power of God with us for all time, brings with him all that we might ever need for life and godliness. The Spirit is *the* gift from which all other gifts flow.

If you want to understand the incredible gift of the Spirit that the Father has made available to the church, you need to read the book of Acts, at each point saying to yourself, “this is for me!” This is a very necessary exercise, because the sad truth is that the book of Acts has been all but ignored by the church over the past 2,000 years. Teachers in the church have tended to look on this wonderful book as an embarrassment, a second-rate book compared with the letters (“*meaty* teaching”) and the gospels (“the teaching of *Jesus*”). Until the start of the 20th century, most scholars considered this book to be of historical interest only (with no theological value), and inaccurate history at that!

Why has this book been so mistreated? Could it be because it shames us by bearing witness to a time when the church was living in a place of spiritual empowerment that has all but been lost over the centuries? Could it be because we do not want to face up to the fact that, if the book of Acts is true, then the church’s experience since that time has been something far less than God’s best? Is it possible that our efforts to explain away the anointing in the apostolic era as “special” and “no longer God’s will for us today” are really just a convenient excuse for unbelief?

I believe the book of Acts is historical; more to the point, I believe it is theologically vital, as well as being historical; I believe the experience of the Spirit found in the book of Acts is for us today, if we will dare to believe what the 1st century Christians believed about the gift of the Father. I believe the book of Acts is the Word of God, vitally relevant for us today.

The Holy Spirit is a gift – not given to the spiritually mature, as a badge of achievement, but given to those who are desperate for God, and who need his power to make them more like Christ. Are you desperate for God? Are you conscious of your unworthiness before God? Are you longing to be more like Christ, but unable to change yourself? Then hold out your hands – the gift of the Father is for you!

- **QUESTION TO PONDER:** *How much do I want the Father’s gift?*
- **FURTHER READINGS:** Ez. 36:24 – 38; Zech. 4:1 – 6; Lk. 24:36 – 49; Jn 14:15 – 21.
- **MEDITATION:** *I reach out my hand to receive everything my Father has for me.*



WEEK 4 / DAY 3: -

The purpose of the gift

MAIN TEXT: Gal. 5:13 – 16.

If the Holy Spirit is *the* gift from the father out of which all his other gifts flow, then what is the purpose for him giving us this gift?

The main purpose of the gift is summed up in today's passage: we are meant to live by the Spirit (v16). But what does this mean? To live by the Spirit means to live in the power of the living God – to live supernaturally rather than naturally. We are *all* called to live in the power of God, and the opposite of this is to live by our own natural abilities. In Paul's language, to live in our own abilities is to live "by the flesh"; but to live in God's power is to live "by the Spirit".

Gal. 5:16 is one of the most crucial verses in the New Testament, for it lays down the fundamental principle of life in the new covenant. Are you troubled by the shortcomings of your own natural life – your sins, your weaknesses, your failings? Then listen to the words of the Apostle: "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

All too often, the beautiful simplicity of Paul's message is lost because of our religious traditions. For we insist on creating "natures" to explain the meaning of something that is inherently very simple. The Spirit is not a "nature" that lives within you – it is God himself come to dwell within you, come to lead you and guide you into all truth. The Spirit is not some mystical spirituality that you gradually become worthy of as you try and keep God's "rules" – he is the gift of God, given to help you when you are conscious of your utter inability to keep the "rules", given to enable you to live "beyond the rules".

I believe it is no coincidence that the simplicity of living by the Spirit has been lost for most of the last 2,000 years, because at the same time the dynamic experience of the infilling of the Holy Spirit was also lost for most believers. You see, most churches have taught (and still teach) that the Holy Spirit is received "automatically" when you are converted (however that is defined). But if this is true (and this "tradition" cannot be sustained by the only book that describes New Testament conversions taking place, the book of Acts), then the Holy Spirit is essentially a doctrine about God rather than an experience of God. And if the church does not believe (and therefore does not preach) that we all need a dynamic, supernatural experience of the Holy Spirit, then how can we expect to live a dynamic, supernatural life?

I believe in the Holy Spirit; I believe he has been sent to me to enable me to live supernaturally. I am desperate to live supernaturally by the power of God, because I am convinced that the New Testament teaches that this is the only way I can live worthy of the gospel that has saved me. Where do you stand on this fundamental issue?

- *QUESTION TO PONDER: How desperate am I for the Holy Spirit to empower me today?*
- *FURTHER READINGS: Num. 11:16 – 30; Jer. 17:5 – 10; Jn 6:52 – 65; Rev. 3:7 – 22.*
- *MEDITATION: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." (Jn 6:63). I therefore choose to live by the Spirit.*



WEEK 4 / DAY 4: - You need to receive the gift

MAIN TEXT: Lk. 11:1 – 13.

The Spirit is a gift, the supreme gift sent by the father to empower us to live under the glorious new covenant of Jesus. How important, therefore, must it be for us to make sure we have truly received the gift the father has sent us. For receive it we must; if the Holy Spirit is a dynamic, supernatural experience, then he cannot come to us secretly, blindly, hiding behind some other experience as if he were "second rate". No, when the Spirit comes to us, he comes in life-transforming power; and he comes at our invitation.

Jesus taught this so clearly in today's passage. God is willing to give us the gift, for it is a free gift; given without reservation – but how desperate are we to receive it? God will give the gift to us when we ask – but how determined are we in our asking? For the context of this passage is unambiguous: God will give the Spirit to those who ask him (v13), but it is the sort of "asking" that is determined, importunate – that will not take no for an answer! (vv5 – 8). We need to ask, and keep on asking until we receive; seek, and keep on seeking until we find; and knock, and keep on knocking until the door of heaven opens to us.

But how will we know if we have received the gift of the Spirit? This is a difficult question to answer definitively, but it shouldn't be a problem if we have the right attitude. In the book of Acts, there are a number of passages that describe what happened when believers received the Holy Spirit – see Ac. 2:1 – 4; 8:14 – 25 (by implication); 10:44 – 48 and 11:15 – 18; and 19:1 – 7. These passages indicate that the most common experience in the New Testament community when the Spirit came upon a believer was the ability to speak in other languages – prophetic languages, not taught by man but by God. This was not the "end goal" of the life of the Spirit (as if this rather curious gift were spiritually more significant than any other gift) but rather the initial entry point into a new covenant lifestyle where the prophetic and the dynamic become "normal".

You too should expect this New Testament experience when the Holy Spirit comes upon you – and then move on from there into the deeper spiritual realms. But can we prove definitively that this is the only evidence of having received the Spirit? Perhaps not; but, if your attitude towards God is right, you will not be looking for the *minimum* experience, but the *maximum*. After all, are you looking to prove that you already have enough of God, or are you desperate for the maximum God has on offer?

I know that, when I first caught a glimpse of the dynamic, Spirit-filled life that God wanted for me, my primary consideration was not theological! I wanted God – and I wasn't prepared to take no for an answer! And if God gave the Apostles the ability to speak in other languages, I saw no reason why I should have something less! So I prayed until I received what they had – and then I rejoiced because I knew that my experience was scriptural.

Everyone's experience is different – but God is still the same. Don't try and force God's hand – don't rob yourself of God's best by accepting a pale imitation of your own strength and ability. I needed to pray for 3 months to receive what I was seeking; with you it might take more time, or less time. But if you ask and keep on asking, you will receive – and you will never be the same again!

- *QUESTION TO PONDER: How does my experience of the Holy Spirit match up with that of the Apostles and the other New Testament believers?*
- *FURTHER READINGS: Ac. 2:29 – 39; 1 Cor. 12:7 – 13; Eph. 1: 11 – 14; Tit. 3:3 – 8.*
- *MEDITATION: "Did I receive the Holy Spirit when I believed?" (Ac. 19:2)*



WEEK 4 / DAY 5: -

The fundamental principle of fruitfulness

MAIN TEXT: Gal. 5:16 – 26.

Having spent the last three days examining the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit, we can return to the main thrust of our meditations this week, which is fruitfulness. What, according to the New Testament, is the fundamental principle of fruitfulness? How does “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” work?

The principle is enunciated in v16 of today’s passage (which was discussed a couple of days ago) as “living by the Spirit”, but it is described in more detail in the verses that follow. Once we have received the gift of the Spirit, there are two ways we can live: by the Spirit, or by our own natural abilities (flesh, or “sinful nature” in the NIV). These two ways are fundamentally opposed to each other (vv17 – 18), so we need to make a conscious decision to live by the Spirit if we are to be fruitful – each and every day of our lives.

If we do not choose to live by the Spirit, then we will live by the flesh by default. And what is the outcome of this way of life? Paul describes the “acts” of the flesh in vv19 – 21. Maybe not all of these signs will be manifest in your life – Paul is not saying that – but some of them certainly will be, because we are all fallen creatures in a fallen world. If you live according to your natural abilities, you will produce “acts” that are consistent with the sins in your own life, and the shortcomings of your own experience and upbringing.

But if you live by the Spirit, then you will not produce “acts” but “fruit” – the fruit that grows on the pure spiritual tree of the Holy Spirit. And what delicious fruit! Love, joy peace ... – who doesn’t want to experience these wonderful fruit!

It is a tragedy that this passage of scripture has all too often been turned upside down by ignorant teachers who have never experienced the life-transforming power of the Spirit. For, all too often we are exhorted from this passage to “try” and be more loving, or more trusting in God, or more joyful – as if “trying” could make a difference! Such preaching encourages us to believe that, if we can somehow concentrate on producing these fruit, then that will “prove” that we are living by the Spirit – which is the exact opposite of what Paul is saying!

Don’t try and produce the fruit of the Spirit – that is God’s responsibility. Instead, focus on the only part that is up to you – the moment by moment decision to listen to the Holy Spirit, do what he says to do, and walk with him in everything you do. If you do this – if you “live” every moment of your day under his leading – then he will ensure that you experience whatever is necessary to mould your character into the image of Jesus; this is his responsibility. And, as this happens, you will manifest the fruit of the Spirit – in ways that you could never have imagined possible.

It’s amazing how simple it really is when you try it God’s way!

- **QUESTION TO PONDER:** *Have I decided to live by the Spirit today?*
- **FURTHER READINGS:** *Is. 5:1 – 7; Mt. 7:15 – 20; Jn 2:1 – 11; Jn 15:1 – 4.*
- **MEDITATION:** *Jesus has turned my water into the wine of his Spirit!*



WEEK 4 / DAY 6: - Holiness is a person!

MAIN TEXT: 2 Cor. 3:7 – 18.

The second principle of fruitfulness, and one that flows naturally out of the first principle, is simply this: holiness is not primarily a matter of rules of behaviour, but a *person*. Holiness is not obeying God's laws, but being conformed to the image of Jesus.

Discipleship is a very personal process; it is a form of spiritual apprenticeship. And how do you become an apprentice? You have to live and work with the master craftsman! You can read a book about how to cut cloth, but that doesn't make you a master tailor. As well as reading the books, you have to serve under the master, listening to what he says, and watching what he does. And as you do this, as you interpret his words by his actions and interpret his actions by his words, and as you apply these truths into your own life, then you will become an expert, just like the master you serve under.

When Jesus wanted to build a church, he chose twelve disciples, not twelve students of the law. To grow in holiness, you need to be with Jesus – and that can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit – not just be with "the book". Those who rely upon "rules" to create holiness must inevitably fail, because they are missing a vital half of the equation – they may understand the "theory", but they will never grasp the "practice".

Today's passage describes the growth in holiness that is the glorious experience of everyone who serves the master teacher Jesus in the power of his Holy Spirit – it is a journey of "ever-increasing glory", of "from glory to glory" (v18b). How does this happen? Precisely because we "reflect the Lord's (i.e. Jesus') glory with unveiled faces" (v18a). There is nothing hidden about the holiness of God radiating from the life of a Spirit-filled believer. We stand in the presence of Jesus; we are transformed into his image; and we reflect his glory!

The old covenant, the covenant of law, could not produce such a wonderful outcome, because the law-based approach to life does not draw us into the very presence of God on a continual basis. To be sure, the law-based approach will have moments when you sense the presence of God in your life – but those moments will be rare, surrounded by longer periods of guilt and frustration. Just like Moses, you will put a veil on your face, a veil of your own choosing, to protect you from the awful reality that the glory of God can never come to you permanently that way.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Then recognise that you are on a journey. And the important point is not the rules you follow, but whether or not you are walking with Jesus. So if you are a disciple, are you in fact walking through life with Jesus, in the power of his Spirit?

- **QUESTION TO PONDER:** *Am I walking with Jesus today?*
- **FURTHER READINGS:** *Is. 54:11 – 15; Mt. 11:25 – 30; Lk. 24:13 – 35; Ac. 4:5 – 13*
- **MEDITATION:** *I want people to note that I have been with Jesus (Ac. 4:13).*

**WEEK 4 / DAY 7: -****Conclusion: abiding in Jesus**

MAIN TEXT: Jn 15:1 – 17.

How shall we conclude this all-important week dwelling on the principles of fruitfulness in God?

Churches have made spiritual maturity so complicated over the years – but it is really very straightforward! Teachers who have learnt their doctrine out of books have made it seem hard – but it is really very simple! All we have to do, the only thing we need to focus on, is to *abide in Jesus*.

Most of us would say “Amen!” to that teaching (which is the main thrust of today’s passage), but many of us still find it difficult to achieve. Why is this? Because we don’t understand how Jesus lived. Many of us see Jesus only as “God in the flesh” – someone so far above and beyond us by very nature – and so the possibility of us being like him (in any meaningful sense of the words) appears ludicrous.

And yet, even though the Bible does teach the divinity of Christ, it does not stress it as a “vast gulf” separating our nature from his. Rather, it stresses the wonder that he chose, on our behalf to “empty himself” to take on our very nature (Phil. 2:6ff) and be made like us “in every way” (Heb. 3:17). In other words, *everything Jesus did (and continues to do) from the moment of his human conception was done as a human being, subject to all the limitations (except sin) that you and I have*. And that means that everything Jesus did is a model, a template, for the glorious possibilities God has for your life, for my life – for the church which is “his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:23).

If Jesus was made like us, and subject to the same limitations as us, then where did he get his miraculous powers from? From the same source that is available to you and me! Just read Lk. 3 – 5, where we see Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit (3:22), being full of the Spirit (4:1), being led by the Spirit (4:1), and moving in the power of the Spirit (4:14). According to the gospel writers, Jesus’ miraculous powers did not derive from his own inherent divinity, but from “the power of the Lord” present with him (5:17). The picture painted of Jesus’ ministry is summed up in 4:18ff: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me ...” – and this is the understanding the Apostles still had of Jesus many years after he rose from the dead (see Ac. 10:38).

Do you have trouble abiding in Jesus? Understand that he has been made exactly like you, so that you can be made exactly like him. Receive his Spirit – the way he did; be led by his Spirit – as he did. Listen to and follow the leading of his Spirit – as he did. And dare to believe that you can walk the way he walked, because you have received exactly the same gift that he received. This is the gospel! This is grace! This is holiness! This is life-transforming power!

- **QUESTION TO PONDER:** *Will I dare to walk today the way Jesus walked?*
- **FURTHER READINGS:** *Jn 5:16 – 23; 1 Cor. 10:21 – 11:1; Eph.5:1 – 21; 1 Jn 2:1 – 6 .*
- **MEDITATION:** *“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus walked.” (1 Jn 2:6). By God’s grace, I will walk today as Jesus walked.*



NOTES



NOTES



NOTES



WEEK 5: Glorious Freedom!

God's will for your life is that you should not be limited by your past, by your natural abilities, or by your circumstances, but rather that you should only be limited by the limitless plans of God for your eternal glorification in Christ.

This series of meditations concludes with an examination of what it means to truly live in the glorious freedom of the children of God



WEEK 5 / DAY 1: -

Focusing on the Spirit

MAIN TEXT: Gal. 3:1 – 5.

This week, we will focus on some key principles that will help you live in the glorious freedom of the Spirit that God has purposed for you, and has purchased for you, in Christ. It is one thing to know that the things we have talked about so far are true; but it is another thing entirely to see these things worked out in your day-to-day life.

The first principle we will mention should be fairly obvious, after what we have talked about in the last few weeks: we need to learn to focus on the Holy Spirit. There are so many things that clamour for our attention – our work, our family, our friends, our physical needs. Even when we come down to the purely spiritual level, there are so many things that we might focus on – Bible reading, prayer, church life, our gifts and calling, and so on. What I am suggesting is that we need to understand clearly that *our first (and, in a very real sense, only) focus should be on the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is God's gift – given to us to lead us into all truth. The Holy Spirit is God's presence – to lead and to guide us through life's difficulties. He is God's power – given to bring the supernatural to bear on the natural. He is the one who makes all the other good things in life worthwhile. So why focus your attention on things, when you can focus on the one who alone gives meaning and purpose to those things?

Today's passage emphasises this very point. "I would like to learn just one thing from you," says Paul (v2) – and that one thing was the manner in which they had received the Holy Spirit. Paul was perplexed by the Galatian churches, because, having started their Christian life in the power of the Spirit, they had somehow been sidetracked into a life focused on the things which were merely human.

Is that where you are at today? Are you conscious that your attention is focused on so many human things, but you have lost the dynamic intimacy of dependence on the Holy Spirit? When you woke up this morning, were you conscious of the fact that God himself was with you, in you, and beside you, able and willing to lead you wherever you need to go, and in whatever you need to do, this day, and forever?

Understand this: you need to cultivate a relationship of intimacy with the Holy Spirit if you are to live the way God wants you to live! So, if you have never done so, start now by deciding to focus your attention on doing just that. Let your goal in praying, reading the Bible, fellowshiping with other believers – let your goal in all these things be to listen for the voice of the Spirit, to feel his gentle but firm leading, and to experience his awesome power in your life, and through your life to others. If you don't know how to do this, ask God in prayer, ask others for advice – whatever it takes, just do it!

- *QUESTION TO PONDER: Am I focused right now on the Holy Spirit – body, mind, soul, and spirit?*
- *FURTHER READINGS: Ac. 8:26 – 40; Ac. 10:9 – 23; Ac. 16:6 – 10; Rom. 8:9 – 14.*
- *MEDITATION: I am a child of God – therefore I can be led by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:14).*



NOTES