

The Spirit Transforms

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[0 : 00] The New Testament vision for following Jesus is not just about belief with our minds.! It's about the transformation of our spirits.

! And that's an ongoing spiritual transformation throughout our whole lives.! As the Spirit dwells in us, the Spirit also moves in us.

It's a dynamic image that Paul gives us. One of being transformed and transformed and transformed. Since we live by the Spirit, he says, therefore let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Very early on in Christian history, Paul was eager to point out the distinction between simply paying lip service to Christianity and Christian belief, and being filled and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There was a little girl, she was about six. And she noticed two things that her dad seemed to do at mealtimes. The first thing was he always insisted that grace was said before meals.

[1 : 18] The prayer of thanksgiving be prayed. The other thing she also noticed, to put it bluntly, he was quite foul-tempered with everybody else, with his family around the table.

The way he spoke to people, he was grumpy. He was quite rude and aggressive at times in the way he spoke to everyone. One day, this six-year-old said to her dad, Daddy, does God hear us when we pray?

He said very sternly, well, of course he does. He said, Daddy, can I ask you another question? Does God hear everything we say?

He said, well, of course he does. He said, Daddy, which does he believe most? Since we live by the Spirit, let's keep in step with the Spirit.

You see, it's one thing to talk of what we believe. It's another thing for the Spirit to be at work in us and to transform us, which is totally the vision that we're given in the New Testament.

[2 : 42] A number of years ago, you may remember, a book was written by somebody called Craig Gruchel, called The Christian Atheist. The subtitle of that book says it all.

It's The Christian Atheist Believing in God, but Living as if He Didn't Exist. There's a warning there to all of us to take a deep, hard, honest look at our lives.

If we seeked, if we talk about living by the Spirit, do we keep in step with the Spirit? We believe in God, but do we live as though He does exist?

And more than that, do we know that transforming presence of the power of His Spirit in our lives? You see, at its most extreme, and this is especially pertinent on Remembrance Sunday, some of the most violent warmongers in history have claimed to be Christian, or at least laid claim to a version of Christianity.

Hitler being one of them. Paul draws a razor-sharp contrast in these words to Galatians, a razor-sharp contrast between life in the flesh, as he calls it, where we're driven by those broken human sinful desires, and life in the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 13] He gives a list of the sort of behaviours you might expect if you're driven by your human brokenness. But then he gives a powerful description of what he describes as the fruit of the Spirit.

And note that it is singular fruit, not plural fruits. In other words, there is the expectation that as the Holy Spirit is at work in us, not just one or two of these fruits will grow, but all of this as a single fruit, with these nine different characteristics, will grow.

Love will grow. Joy will grow. Peace will grow. Patience will grow. Kindness will grow. Goodness will grow. Faithfulness will grow.

Gentleness will grow. And self-control will grow. Not one or two at the exclusion of the others. But we are to expect, as this transformation takes place, for all of this to grow and flourish.

This list of dimensions of spiritual fruit, remember it is just one fruit, differs from elsewhere.

[5 : 31] Paul talks in the New Testament about gifts of the Holy Spirit, because when Paul talks about gifts of the Holy Spirit, whether that be healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, whatever it may be, it's not necessarily that every Christian will be given every single gift.

We are gifted in different ways. That's how the body of Christ flourishes. But not so when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. The expectation, the understanding is laid out very clearly by Paul, that the fruit of the Spirit is expected in every Christian believer.

So as you seek the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, expect all of these things, all of them, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, to grow in your life.

And you know, a really great way of engaging with that is at the beginning each day to pray through that list, to invite the Holy Spirit to move among you and to pray intentionally for each of those things.

I recently heard it put this way, and he said, if you want to put this in action, if we're really serious about transformation and the fruit of the Spirit growing, let's aspire to be triple A Christians. The three A stands for three things.

[6 : 52] Okay, so acknowledgement, attention, and action. What do they mean? Well, acknowledgement means at the beginning of the day, make it the very first thing you do to try to push aside all the other things that you might have on your mind and focus on that one single truth that you are a child of God, that you are His.

Acknowledge that before anything else gets into your mind. Remember, Scripture before screens. Acknowledge who you are in Christ.

Remember Paul says here in verse 22, those who belong to Christ. In Christ you're given a new identity. You're a child of God. Know that.

You've probably heard me share this story before, but I'm going to tell it again. A story about a group of eggs that, there were chickens' eggs and one eagle egg, and they all hatched at the same time.

I don't know how the eagle egg got in among the others, but it did. And these birds, these chickens and one eagle, grew up together. The eagle, being on his own, just copied the chickens all day long, clucked around, looked rather silly as they all grew bigger and bigger and bigger.

[8 : 18] But that was the only thing he'd ever known, to walk around on the floor all day, clucking around like a chicken and eating the food from the ground. That was life for this eagle.

One day, another adult eagle flew above the place where these birds were. And they all looked up and gasped in wonder as they saw this eagle with its wings stretched out wide in full flight and majesty.

The eagle on the ground, who didn't realise that he could fly, stretched out his wings and said to his chicken friends, do you think I could?

And they laughed at him. Don't be stupid, they said. You're one of us. We're born to be in this space, to cluck around and to eat our food each day.

And so tragically, that majestic bird never took off, even though he had been born to fly.

[9 : 40] The sad, tragic reality is that every time somebody rejects Jesus and everything he stands for, they accept the life of the chicken, not realising that every single one of us has been given those wings and that we are born to fly.

There's no exclusivity in this. It's for everybody. The gospel is for everybody. And God has plans and purposes for each and every one of us that only you can fulfil because only you are you.

and only you have been designed and shaped and formed and given the experiences and taken through those experiences. Only you can fulfil those plans and purposes that God has for you.

And it's never too late. Any age, any stage in life, we can know this reality. To be born to fly most essentially means you know who you are.

You acknowledge you are a child of God. Make it the first thing you do each day. If you want to grow, if you want to see the fruit of the Spirit grow, begin by acknowledging it at the start.

[10 : 53] The second A is attention. Having acknowledged, having acknowledged it, stay attentive to it. I say that as though it's easy and it's not.

I realise that. We get distracted by all sorts of things that come our way during the course of the day. But our call is to practice the presence of God. See your tasks throughout the day not just as tasks.

See them as ministry. The ministry that God has given you that only you can fulfil because only you are in that particular place at that particular time in a way that nobody else on this planet is.

Give your attention to it. As Paul says in Thessalonians, pray without ceasing. So acknowledgement, attention, and the third one is action.

You know, it's not that we should go around all the time thinking what should I avoid? What should I not do? Rather, to keep in step with the Spirit is about asking the question what aspect of fruit of the Spirit might grow now?

[12 : 13] That positive action. Not what do I not do, but what do I do? Holy Spirit, I acknowledge that I'm a child of God.

I give attention to your presence, so Lord, lead me into action. What are you putting before me now? And let's remember that that list that we refer to as the fruit of the Spirit is there as a vision from God for what we can become in a life of freedom, knowing our identity in Him and not something that we just follow out of slavish morality.

There's one last story and then we'll pray. And it's about a woman who got married. Well, a man and a woman that got married.

But the story is about this particular lady who was presented with a list from her new husband. on one side of this piece of paper was a list of all the things that he promised that he would do and that he regarded as what he would do in the life of that marriage each day or each week or each year, whatever it may be.

He said, these are the things that you can expect from me that I bring to the table, the jobs that I will do, the responsibilities I will take. And on the other side of that piece of paper was another list and he said, here is the list of things that I expect from you.

[13 : 42] Things that I expect you to do. He arranged all sorts of different tasks, duties and expectations. The woman was quite puzzled by the fact that he presented what seemed almost like a contract.

But she took it seriously and she tried her best each day to look at that list and remind herself of the things that her husband wanted her, expected her to do for him.

After a few years, forgive the bluntness of this story, her husband became sick and died. After a period of mourning, this woman eventually met somebody else, fell in love and got married.

Years passed, indeed decades passed and this woman was blissfully happy in that relationship. One day she was going through some things in a drawer, some old papers, having a bit of a clear out, and she saw an envelope which she sort of vaguely recognised but had forgotten all about.

She couldn't remember what was inside. She opened it up and pulled out the very list. That had been given to her in her first marriage. And as she read back once again at the list of expectations that her first husband had had of her, the things that he expected her to do each day, she came to realise that in her new marriage of love and being loved, she actually did everything on that list.

[15 : 57] The thing is it wasn't a list for her. It didn't need to be written down. It wasn't a code. It wasn't a set of rules.

It was simply what you do when you love and know that you are loved. God, since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in touch.

Let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let's acknowledge each day that we're children of God, born of His Spirit.

Throughout each day, let's be attentive to that reality. And let's be people of action, not because we're a slave to a list of expectations and demands, but because we know who we are in Christ, filled with His Spirit.

Let's pray together. Lord, thank You that You create us to be Your children, to love You and to know that we are loved by You.

[17 : 25] So fill us with Your Spirit and transform us by Your Spirit, that the fruit of Your Spirit would grow in our lives each day, each week, each month, each year.

Transform our lives and shape us into the people that You long for us to be. We may know that we are born to fly.

Amen.