

The Shape of a Spiritual Life

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Andrew. As Andrew mentioned before, last week we began talking about how the Spirit works through the Word to bring us into new life and to bring us into contact with Jesus.

We talked about what spirituality was and how widespread the desire is for spirituality. We all, Christians and non-Christians in many cases, desire for contact with something higher.

And we desire to live the best version of ourselves. These are the kind of consistent elements of what we might call spirituality. And we find those realities only in Christ. But we need the Holy Spirit to enable us to belong to Christ.

And we need the Holy Spirit to change us within and to bring us truth about Jesus. So this week I wanted to talk about being, once we belong to Jesus, once the Spirit has revealed the truth about Jesus to us and enabled us to belong to Him and believe Him and receive Him, what does a spiritual life in Christ look like?

And just for a couple of minutes, why don't you turn to the person next to you and see if you can think of some signs of a spiritual life.

[1 : 2 1] What do you look for if you're thinking of a spiritual person? What would you see? What are the signs of it? All right, well, why don't we stop there.

Bear the answers that you came up with in mind for later on and we'll compare them to what comes out of our study of God's Word as we go along. Tonight, what I want to do is kind of give a general outline of the role of the Holy Spirit in our Christian life.

And in some ways, this will be a kind of recap and a development of my Holy Spirit doctrine series in 2013, which I think is probably in the sermon archive as well online.

But if you were there, you'll kind of detect some resonances and some developments. So here, I just want to lay out some basic realities about the Christian life here, leading to our being able to map the shape of a spiritual life.

So the first point is, the basis of a spiritual life is being united with Christ in His death and new life. Have a look at Galatians 2.20, where we can see a kind of terrific little encapsulation of that.

[2 : 4 4] Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ, says Paul, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

So notice at the end there, he's talking about Jesus dying in His place. Jesus gave Himself for me. Jesus is His substitute. He died on the cross in our place for our sins.

This is one of the few places, of course, in the New Testament where it's applied directly personally. Often it's a corporate reality. Here Paul is saying, Jesus died for me, which we can all say if we're Christians.

But at the beginning of that verse, Paul also says, I have been crucified with Christ. In other words, Christ physically died alone as my substitute instead of me.

And yet Paul can also say in some spiritual sense that I died with Christ. This kind of idea of a corporate reality, a corporate personality of Christ is absolutely essential to the New Testament.

[4 : 05] It sounds unfamiliar to us in kind of our late Western individualistic society, but actually it's very true of our world as well. If I became a Richmond supporter, I would suddenly say we won the grand final in 2017.

I didn't actually participate in the grand final. I wasn't on the field. I didn't even back for Richmond at that stage. But suddenly I can say we won the grand final in 2017.

That is, the reality of that team now becomes my reality. I become part of the wider Richmond body, if you like. Well, that's true of Christ as well.

He died on the cross 2,000 years ago. And spiritually, I died with him when I became a Christian. So that's what Paul means when he says, I have been crucified with Christ.

It's if he is in Christ, dying on the cross with him. But at the same time, Christ is also in Paul. So he is in Christ, dying on the cross.

[5 : 20] Christ is in Paul, affecting and transforming his life. The influence of Christ, the presence of Christ in his life is his real life.

I don't care about the rest of my life, he's saying here. I don't care about being a Pharisee or a Jew or fulfilling the law. The thing that is most important, the true me now, is Jesus within me.

I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

So if we can have a look at the first slide, I'll see if I can try and show this pictorially. What happens when we become Christians is we, as sinners, because that's the kind of darkness of sin there, we join with Christ, we enter Christ's corporate body, and now we become part of Christ who has died and is risen.

We are in Christ objectively. So we're still sinners, but we belong to Christ and we belong to his death and resurrection. We share in that.

[6 : 37] So becoming a Christian means being united to Christ and sharing in his death. It's a fact, it's a reality. At the same time, next slide, becoming a Christian means sharing in Christ's life as well as his death.

So we share in his death on the cross. And as his Holy Spirit begins to change us, Christ works in us, as Paul says, to change us from within.

So we are in Christ and Christ is in us. We can see similar kind of things in the next passage that I've printed out in Romans chapter 6. Don't you know, says Paul, that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with.

[7 : 54] So here again, we have the same idea. Baptized into Christ means being baptized into his death. I think here, as we'll see when we get to 1 Corinthians 12, I think he's talking about a spiritual reality.

He refers to baptism because it's a way of describing the moment we became Christians. But it's the spiritual inclusion in Christ that he's really got in mind here.

We are baptized, included, immersed in, if you like, Christ. That's the meaning of the word in Greek. We're immersed in Christ, submerged in Christ, become part of Christ.

And therefore, we become part of his death. In order that, we can also become part of his life. We can share in the new spiritual life that he has now as raised from the dead.

And notice that it is both a present and a future reality. He says we will also be united with him in a resurrection like his at the end of verse 5.

[8 : 59] But also, we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with. In other words, it's meant to be a present reality as well.

Already, the new life of Christ, if we're Christians, can start to become part of our lives. Will start to become part of our lives if we're Christians. Which is why later on in verse 13 he says, Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

And offer every part of yourself to him as instruments of righteousness. In other words, now that we are in Christ objectively, we have spiritual resources from Christ working in us to live a new life.

We've shared in his death. Now we can share in his life. So these two aspects of being united with Christ. If you came along to the Reformation doctrine series last year, I kind of stressed this in both Lutheran and Calvinist theology.

And I'll reread a quote, terrific quote from Luther that I included last year. And that's where Luther says, The apostle teaches Christ and the soul become one flesh.

[10 : 15] Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own. And whatever the soul has, Christ claims is his own.

Here this, and he uses the analogy of a prince marrying a prostitute. Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor wicked harlot.

Redeems her from all her evil and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot destroy her now since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him.

And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as her own. And which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell.

Belonging to Christ, being in Christ, means that our sins have been taken by him. And he has taken responsibility for our sins and died for them. And we now have his life and his righteousness given to us, both objectively and as the spirit works subjectively.

[11 : 23] The next point I want to make, though, is that this takes place through the Holy Spirit. Have a look at 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12.

Paul says, Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one spirit, so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one spirit to drink.

So notice there that it's the spirit who baptizes us to form one body, in verse 13.

And that body, of course, from verse 12, is Christ. It's Christ's body that has these many different parts, which are one. And it's the Holy Spirit that baptizes us or immerses us or binds us into that spiritual body, which is Christ.

We all belong to Christ through the one spirit, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, etc. So it's the spirit who enables this spiritual union, this union with Christ.

[12 : 47] He says the same thing earlier, actually, in chapter 6. He's specifically speaking of the individual Christian. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Shall I then take his warning against sexual immorality here? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

For it is said the two will become one flesh. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. In other words, a union with Christ is a more real and spiritual version of the union between a man and a wife.

When we become Christians, we become one in spirit with Christ. We are united with Christ through the spirit. John Calvin says, By the grace and the power of the same spirit we are made his members to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him.

That joining together of head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts, In short, that mystical union, he calls it mystical because nobody fully understands or really understands how it works, are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has endowed us.

[14 : 19] Okay, so they're the kind of basic elements of Christian life. It is union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Union with Christ through the Spirit.

The basis of a spiritual life is being united with Christ in his death and new life, and it takes place through the Spirit. So that's, again, what it means to be a Christian.

What does it mean to, what does it look like to live as a Christian in light of that? Well, that's what we're going to look at next. First, I've printed out a section from Ephesians 4, 1 to 16.

I've said in the heading it's 4 to 16. No, it's actually 4, 1 to 16. But I might read from the Bible, actually, because I skipped out verses 8 to 10, just for short, for it to kind of make more space.

But I think it would be good to read the whole thing. So if you want to look it up in your Bibles, that's fine. Otherwise, you can just listen. So Paul says, I'll just give you a little bit of background here.

[15 : 30] So Paul has been in the pattern of Ephesians. He's been describing what God has done for us in Christ, how we were dead in our sins and he made us alive with Christ.

Again, this union with Christ, being made alive with Christ. And he raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms and all this stuff that God has done for us in Jesus. So he talks about that.

Then in chapter 3, he has a little bit of a side about his apostolic ministry. And then he comes back in chapter 4 to say, OK, how do we live in the light of all these great things that God has done for us?

And that's where we're picking up here. OK, Ephesians 4. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

[16 : 27] There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

What does he ascended mean, except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and teachers to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming.

- [17 : 44] Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Okay. So what is the goal of a spiritual life, according to Paul here in chapter 4?

We'll have a look at verses 13 and 14 again. Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming, instead speaking the truth in love and so on.

Sorry, no, not so and so on. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. So the goal of our faith, the goal of our spiritual journey, is being like Christ together, reflecting his character, so knowing more about him and becoming more like him, and growing to maturity to resist lies.

- [19 : 26] I think in the wider context of spirituality, especially in the wider world, spirituality is a kind of luxury that we add on to our lives, isn't it?

It's a, I've got enough food, I've got work, I've got a house, a place to live, now I've got to develop myself spiritually.

It's a kind of an add-on. Your self-realisation at the end of your physical needs. Paul is saying, and the whole New Testament says, it's actually a matter of life and death.

It's absolutely essential. We are under threat of being deceived. We saw that last week. We can't trust ourselves. We've got the world and the devil trying to trick us.

And we need spiritual maturity to withstand that. So that's part of what Paul is saying we should be aiming for here.

- [20 : 25] So knowing Christ, being like Christ together, and notice again that it's a corporate reality here. We all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

I wonder when you talked about what the signs of what it looks like to be spiritual in that question at the beginning, whether you had in mind corporate reality or individual reality.

I think our first instinct is, if you're like me, we talk about a spiritual person is somebody who reads their Bible in the mornings and prays. A spiritual person is obedient to God.

A spiritual person goes to church. Things like that, all true. And we'll talk more about the individuality, individual spiritual life next week. But notice here, Paul's focus is actually on the corporate life of the church.

We become spiritual together. We become mature together. We achieve, we inherit the fullness of Christ.

- [21 : 28] We become like him in his experience and his character together. The church, he says, is the fullness of him who fills everything in every way in chapter 1, verse 21.

Together, we fill out the life of Christ. We recapitulate the life of Christ. We echo the life of Christ in this world, in our life together. So that's the goal.

What is the spiritual reality that enables that goal? Have a look at verses 3 to 6 and verse 16. It's the spiritual unity and the unity we have in our faith and hope and baptism and relationship to God, isn't it?

And there, of course, is the limit, the means and the limit of unity. We cannot have unity with people who, in this sense, with people who don't acknowledge the hope or Lord or God and Father.

We'll resist the gospel, in other words. There's only one body and one spirit. He's talking here, of course, about the universal church, the true church, the body of everybody who belongs to Jesus.

[22 : 53] So it's a spiritual reality. And in verse 16, From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

So the other part of it is that this spiritual reality connects us to Christ, just as we've seen. If we could go two slides ahead, I think we'll get to what I'm trying to show there.

Thank you. So there is my attempt to show in a diagrammatic form. Verse 16, I guess.

From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. So there is Christ himself, and we are joined to him.

We are part of his spiritual body. And within his spiritual body, the members of the church build each other up. They are united to Christ by his spirit and united to each other by the ligaments of the spirit, the gifts of the spirit.

[24 : 06] And as they exercise their gifts and love each other, we'll get to that in a second, the body of Christ grows. The church grows. The church becomes holy, more holy.

The church grows in numbers. The corporate body of Christ increases. Notice the type of people we need to be, though, if we want to participate fruitfully in this reality.

So in verses 2 and 3, he says, Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

In other words, this spiritual reality, this spiritual unity we have, needs to be nurtured and developed. Just like you have a unity with the members of your family, but your relationship with the members of the family needs to be looked after as well.

You can be related to somebody, but estranged in one sense, can't you? He's saying we need to maintain, we need to go to an effort to maintain unity with those with whom we are actually united with by the spirit.

[25 : 29] There needs to be an effort. And we need to be, we need certain kind of characteristics to be like that too. We need to be, verse 2, humble and gentle and patient and bearing with one another, patient with one another, long-suffering with one another in love.

We'll look at verse 12 then. We need to be people who are, who understand the needful works of service.

So, humble, gentle, loving, serving, committed to unity. In verse 15, speaking the truth in love.

We need to be people who speak the truth in love, who are committed to truth and love. Of course, the classic dichotomy there is some of us like truth.

We're very committed to truth. We're not so committed to love. Some of us are touchy-feely kind of people. We like the idea of love and unity. We don't like sticking up for truth.

[26 : 46] But Paul is saying we need to be both. Friends will say hard things to other people sometimes and need to say hard things to other people sometimes. But it needs to be done in love.

So that's the kind of people we need to be if we want to be spiritual, if we want to participate in this spiritual life that Paul is talking about, the life that builds itself up in Christ.

And notice how we get equipped, verses 11 and 12. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

And verse 15, instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. So how do we get equipped to be these people that we need to be?

Well, according to what Paul says, it's through the ministry of the word. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

[27 : 59] Paul here reflects what he says in other places, that the foundation of the church is the apostolic witness. He says in Ephesians 2.20, that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

He says something similar in 1 Corinthians 12 as well. Christ has appointed first of all the apostles. Immediately after, of course, he mentions the prophets.

And that is a difficult word to interpret these days. Some people think he means here those people who have occasional words of insight given from God.

We see that kind of thing in 1 Corinthians 14 or the prophetic ministries in places like Acts 21, the daughters of Philip the evangelist. That's possible. That's possible.

Though in Ephesians 2.20, he seems to be to have something in mind that is stronger than that. The foundation of the of the apostles and prophets seems to be more authoritative.

[29 : 12] Accordingly, some people think that maybe it's just the Old Testament he has in mind, the Old Testament prophets. Well, that too is possible, though in Ephesians 3.4 and 5, he seems to be talking about something that's happening in the contemporary time.

He's at his in his age. Ephesians 3.4 in reading this, then you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations, as it has now been revealed by the spirit to God's holy and holy apostles and prophets.

So I think my hunch, I think, here is that what he's talking about here is the fact that in this generation, apostolic authority has kind of fuzzy borders.

That is, the New Testament is written in Maine under the authority of the apostles, but we have some parts of it, for example, written by non-apostles, Mark or Luke or the writer of Hebrews.

So it's the apostles and these people closely associated with the apostles who are our authority. And of course, it's important to remember that this is in that first generation where the apostles, the first line of or first foundation of the church can give approval, can extend their authority to the writings and words of these other prophets.

[30 : 44] Anyway, whatever is the answer here, the important thing to remember, of course, is it's the apostolic ministry, which is foundational.

And so Paul in 1 Corinthians 14.37 would say, if anybody wants to call themselves a prophet or spiritual, let them acknowledge that what I say is the word of the Lord.

The apostolic testimony is the foundation of the church. But it doesn't stop there, does it?

The apostolic ministry, the apostolic foundation of that first generation, carries on through, or is expressed through, is a better way of saying it, expressed through the ministries of evangelists and pastors and teachers.

There are those who pass on the apostolic deposit to us, but not just them. Again, verse 15. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ.

[31 : 58] In other words, all of us are called to some form of word ministry. There is the great foundational ministry of the apostles. There is also the ministry of pastors, teachers and evangelists.

And we too, in our own way, great and small, are also called to speak and encourage and exhort one another using that same word. In Ephesians 5.19, he'll describe what it's like to live a spirit-filled life.

And part of that, he says, is speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.

But speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. In other words, all of us are called in one way or another to participate in this spiritual ministry.

Peter Adam says, Those of us who are committed to preaching need to be committed to a wider ministry of the word as well.

[33 : 15] The forming of the life of the congregation in conformity to the Bible. The training of others in the ministry of the word. Private exhortation and encouragement. The production of Christian literature and dissemination. And the evangelization of unbelievers.

And we could add there the informal encouragement and reminders of believers in a congregation to each other. As Paul says in Colossians 3.16, Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.

Singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Again, same stuff from Ephesians 5.19. All of us are called to participate in this spiritual ministry. So, have a look at the spirituality checklist.

What does it mean to be spiritual? What does it mean to live a spiritual life? What's the shape of biblical spirituality? Here are some questions to help us. Do I think about Jesus and how to become more like him?

Do I seek to preserve Christian unity in difficult situations? Do I think much about how I can serve others at church?

[34 : 30] Do I value the Bible and encourage those who make it known? Do I use scripture to encourage and exhort others? Do I do it lovingly? Am I a thankful person?

Just picking up on those Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 verses. We'll talk more about that next week. So, my point, I guess, here is that growing up as a Christian, the spiritual life after we become Christians follows the same pattern that brought us to faith in Christ in the first place.

It's being united to Christ through the Spirit, through the Word. It's experiencing the power of the Spirit to grow us into Christ, to help us to know Christ and be more like him through the Word and through responding to it together.

We're called to a great spirituality. The desire for spirituality is to find our place in the universe and find ourselves.

Paul tells us that our place in the universe as Christians is the highest it could be. We belong to Christ who, as he says in chapter 1, ascended above all power and authority.

[35 : 52] We belong to Christ, he says here in 4.10, the one who fills the whole universe. We have our place in Christ, the highest place possible in God's universe.

And we also have in Christ news about how we live and find ourselves too. Our place is to exercise the gifts that we've been given, to serve one another, to receive spiritual power, to be bound into the body of Christ, to be built up and build up part of his spiritual body.

One nice finish there and we'll have a break for a minute. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this great life that you've given us in Christ.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit who makes us part of him. Thank you for the word of the apostles and prophets. And thank you for those who have taught us and pastored us and shared the gospel with us.

Please help us to live life worthy of these great realities that you've made us part of. Help us to be people who love your word, who love Jesus and become more like him together.

[37 : 17] Help us to be humble and gentle. Help us to be willing to serve. Help us to pursue unity. Help us to know our place in your world and discover our place in your church through obeying it, obeying your word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.