

# The Gospel of Jesus Christ: From With to In

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*"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).*

With these simple words, Jesus introduces the primary difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. God had always been working in the world. The Holy Spirit was present from the very beginning of creation, and throughout the entire Old Testament we see evidence of His working. To those who had eyes to see and a heart for God He was not hidden, and evidences of His presence were very real. But the end of the Old Covenant came, and in John 14-16, after the last supper with His disciples before His death, Jesus introduces the New Covenant. What was the essential element of the New? It was that God would now take up residence in His temple--a temple not made by hands.

How was this to take place? What was lacking in the Old that would be fulfilled in the New? The disciples at this point were becoming fearful, for Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled." Why were they fearful? For as long as Jesus had been with them, He was their solution to everything. When the Pharisees came against them, they only had to put the matter in the hands of Jesus and He took care of it every time. If the crowds had no food, they turned to Jesus. If the storm was about to overturn their boat, they called on Jesus. Yet with all of this wonderful history, Jesus makes this statement: *"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:5-7).*

How could it possibly be to their advantage that Jesus would go away? They could not comprehend that. Jesus explained it to them like this: *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:12-15).*

Jesus was in effect saying, "Your ability to comprehend the things of God at this point is very limited. I know you do not understand, but you will understand in the near future. When the Holy Spirit comes everything will be better than it is now. Trust Me--believe that I know what I am doing." *"Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, 'Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you'" (John 16:19-22).*

What needed to happen before these promises of Jesus could be fulfilled? Jesus had to go to the cross. The price of sin had to be paid. Jesus needed to rise from the dead and ascend to the Father. Then He would receive the Gift of Promise from the Father and pour out the Holy Spirit for all men. When the Holy Spirit came, He would bring God to abide within the believer and be with us always in intimate fellowship. All of these things are familiar to most of us, but the disciples did not yet understand them. Personally, I think this is the primary meaning of this statement: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:1-3). Jesus was going to the cross to prepare a place in God for us. We could not enter into the holy of holies until that price was paid. The blood of bulls and goats was not sufficient. We know that when Jesus died, the curtain that kept men out of the holy place was torn from top to bottom. This indicated that God no longer dwelt there, and the way was now open for all to enter into fellowship with God in an intimate way. That way was Jesus. *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'"* (John 14:6).

So how does Jesus do this? How does He bring us into the fellowship of God? We have already quoted John 14:15-18 but let us continue. *"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him"* (John 14:19-21). Jesus says that we will live because He lives. Of course He was alive at that point, but He was about to go through death for us. If He did not come out of the grave, we could not live. But He arose! *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:17-18).

At Calvary Jesus revealed who He was. He laid down His life for us and then took it again. This was God's plan. It was not an accident. At Calvary Jesus displayed for the whole world to see that He is God: triumphant over any power that could come against Him. But He did not do this just so we could see and marvel, but so that we could enter into this same life. *"Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will'"* (John 5:19-21).

Jesus went through Calvary so that He could give us life: not separate from Him, but His very own life. This is the only way we can enter into the fellowship of God. He is the life, He is the way to life and He gives us life. *"Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'"* (John 6:32-35). How does Jesus give us life? *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63).

We are told very clearly by Peter on the day of Pentecost what happened. *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear"* (Acts 2:32-33). Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit had come upon a man (usually a prophet) for brief times, but on that day for the first time in the history of the world, God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit came to indwell men. The Holy Spirit (God) moved from "with" to "in," and in so doing He brought the life of God to men. Jesus fulfilled His promise to the disciples and came to them, because God is one. *"Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'"* (John 14:22-23). When the Holy Spirit came to abide, He brought the Father and Son with Him.

Brothers and sisters, this is the gospel, the "good news." Jesus has paid the way that God may dwell within us and we may enter into the fellowship of God. What greater thing could there be? Yes, there are good things that lead up to this indwelling, and others that follow after, but the pivotal point is that the temple of God is now among men. *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"* (I Cor. 3:16-17).

It is no longer just Jesus with us or the Holy Spirit with us, or the Holy Spirit coming on us from time to time, but God in us and us in God. Glory to God! That is the good news that should ring in our hearts and bless our souls every day and every hour. God dwells within us by the Spirit! Hallelujah, Amen!

## **The Disciples Before Pentecost**

All this being true, one of the questions that may come to our hearts is this: what was the spiritual condition of the disciples before Pentecost? If the Holy Spirit did not dwell in them, what was their relationship with God? I think the proper answer to this question can help us to answer other questions that pertain more directly to us.

First of all we have this statement by Jesus: *"Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean'"* (John 13:10-11). *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3). What do we understand from "You are clean"? Were their sins forgiven? I would say yes. Did they have a clear relationship with Jesus? I would also say yes. Had Jesus forgiven the sins of others besides the twelve disciples? *"Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'* And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, *'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace'"* (Luke 7:48-50). I believe we can say without a doubt that the sins of many were forgiven because of the word that Jesus spoke to them. In addition to the twelve disciples, many followed Him and were even sent out in pairs to proclaim the good news.

Were the disciples able to comprehend to some degree who Jesus was? *"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'"* (Matt.

16:13-17). Peter did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, but God was able to reveal things to him and Peter was able to declare them confidently. From other accounts we see that these men were limited in their ability to comprehend the things of God, but they were not without some understanding, and it was God who gave them that understanding.

Were these disciples able to hear God? *"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live"* (John 5:25). The appeal of Jesus to those who heard Him was to recognize the word of God that was coming to them. Some heard, and most did not. This tells us that it is possible for a "dead man" to "hear God." That takes a miracle that we cannot understand with the natural mind. But a man must begin somewhere, and that "somewhere" is hearing God speak to his heart. That word (the living word of God) creates faith within a receptive heart, and as a man takes hold of the word and believes it, it becomes his lifeline to God. So men without the indwelling Spirit of God can hear God speak to them.

Were these men (particularly the twelve disciples) consistent and stable? Right after Peter made his confident statement of who Jesus was (which was commended by Jesus) we read this account: *"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'"* (Matthew 16:21-23). In a short period of time Peter went from being commended by Jesus to being told "Get behind Me, Satan!"

*"And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village"* (Luke 9:54-56). It appears from this account that the ability of the disciples to have proper discernment in a situation was very limited indeed. They were reasoning with their natural minds, using their own knowledge of scripture, and applying their understanding to the situation at hand, but according to Jesus they certainly missed the mark, even with the best intentions.

Did the disciples have power? We are all familiar with the account of Peter's failure. *"Peter answered and said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.' Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And so said all the disciples"* (Matt. 26:33-35). *"And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.' Then he began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!' Immediately a rooster crows. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So he went out and wept bitterly"* (Matt. 26:73-75). Although Peter had a firm intention to stand with Jesus in the hour of trial, he found himself totally without power to do it.

We could look at other accounts, but I think from these few we can begin to draw some conclusions. These men who had the Holy Spirit with them but not yet in them were clear in their relationship with God and could hear God, but they lacked stability, discernment, and power. They could operate with Jesus to some degree, and were even sent out to heal the sick and proclaim the message of that hour, but they were limited in many ways. A new day was coming, and it was better that Jesus go away so the Holy Spirit could come. When we see Peter on the day of Pentecost, we see a new Peter. Before, he

ran from a slave girl, but now we see him standing before all Jerusalem to tell the leaders that they had just murdered their Messiah! Can we comprehend that? What had happened? The Holy Spirit had come from "with" to "in." That was the difference.

## **You Shall Receive Power**

Let us look more closely at the scripture to see what the Holy Spirit does when He comes to abide within. *"And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to ?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'"* (Acts 1:4-8).

Here we are told that when the Holy Spirit came, the disciples would receive power. What was this power for? Jesus said, "You shall be witnesses to Me." Naturally these disciples could give a firsthand, eyewitness account of all they had seen, including the death and resurrection of Jesus. But to give that "witness to Christ," they needed something beyond themselves. They needed the power of God. We have already mentioned how Peter stood before all Jerusalem and gave witness to what had taken place. *"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all"* (Acts 4:33). *"And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch"* (Acts 5:12).

The power that was manifest through these men was more than just ability to speak words. There was a grace or ability that was beyond natural explanation. God was now dwelling within them, revealing Himself through them. It was the fulfillment of these words from Jesus: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"* (John 14:12-14). As we read through the book of Acts we see the "acts of the Holy Spirit" through men: not just men who were convinced that Jesus was God, but a continuation of the manifestation of the life of Jesus through men.

The power that these men received was not separate from God but rather the power that comes with the presence of God. God had come to abide within, and when God comes He brings all that He is. We cannot know the attributes of God separate from God, and when the Holy Spirit (God) comes to abide, He does not come in part. *"For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure"* (John 3:34). When a person receives the Holy Spirit, he does not receive some "thing." He receives God, and in receiving God within he receives all that God is. That is why Paul could say: *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily"* (Col. 1:27-29).

Many times it is held before us that we need power to "witness for Jesus" and "do work for God." While there may be some truth in these statements, I believe there is a greater truth that we need to grasp: that God has not called us to just "tell people about Jesus," but to live the very life of God as a son of God. We are called to be a living witness unto the character of God, and to do that we need a power that is not of ourselves. Strictly speaking, we do not "work for God," but rather God works in us

to do His will. That working becomes real as we abide in Christ and He in us. Out of this union, works will come forth that are works of God (or works of the Holy Spirit). These works are expressed in vessels of clay, but they are expressions of the divine presence of God--visible expressions of the power of God. In simple words, we need power to be what God has called us to be: sons of God.

## Sons of God

Today we often freely refer to a Christian as a "son of God." However, I think it is very significant that we do not see the disciples called "sons of God" during the time Jesus was with them. Why not? What makes us sons of God?

During His ministry here on earth, Jesus most commonly referred to Himself as the "Son of man." However, others referred to Him as the "Son of God." "And the angel answered and said to her, *'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'*" (Luke 1:35). "And John bore witness, saying, *'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God'*" (John 1:32-34).

Paul refers to Jesus as "the firstborn among many brethren." *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren"* (Rom. 8:29). In Hebrews we find the same language, with Christ referred to as our elder brother. *"For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You'"* (Heb. 2:10-12). Is it really possible for us to be so closely related with God that we may be called "sons of God" and to refer to Jesus as "our brother"? If so, how is this accomplished?

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a statement of the gospel. The Galatians had begun well, but they had turned away and Paul is making a strong bid for them to turn back to the true gospel. *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:6-8). It was not just a little error that had crept into their midst, but enough to completely destroy them. *"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace"* (Gal. 5:4).

What was the gospel that Paul was declaring to them? We cannot discuss the entire letter to the Galatians, but we want to focus on the heart of it. Paul said that they had begun in the Spirit but were now trying to finish in the flesh. They were adding something to Jesus "just in case" Jesus was not enough. In so doing, they revealed that they were not really moving in faith, and thus not partaking of the grace of God that comes through faith in Jesus alone.

As Paul goes to the heart of the matter, I believe the following scripture is extremely important: *"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?-- Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in*

*vain--if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (Gal. 3:1-5)

Notice what Paul concentrates on. He talks about "receiving the Spirit" and "a supply of the Spirit" that is seen through supernatural manifestations. He says both come by "the hearing of faith." His argument is that the "works of the law" (what we can do on our own separate from God) do not produce this supply. Christ died to supply something that could come in no other way. Furthermore, he says that if it could come another way, the sacrifice of Christ was in vain (Gal. 2:21).

How then do we become sons of God? *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26-27). *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"* Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:4-7).

Brothers and sisters, I would say that this is the critical point. What does faith in Christ bring? Does not faith receive the Holy Spirit (God) into our lives? Is this not why Christ died? He died to open the way for God to indwell us by the Spirit. We are baptized in the Spirit into union with Christ. The indwelling Spirit takes us into fellowship with God and makes us a son of God in reality whereby we can know God as our "Daddy." Paul brings out the same truth in writing to the Romans. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"* (Rom. 8:14-16). If this is presently not your understanding, I appeal to you to read the entire book of Galatians through carefully and ask God to reveal His mind regarding this great salvation.

## **The Body of Christ**

This union with God that is created when the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us has many implications. We want to briefly mention one of them here that is particularly important to us. *"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"* (Eph. 1:22-23). *"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"* (I Cor. 12:27).

*"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another"* (Rom. 12:4-5). These scriptures all speak of us being part of "the body of Christ" and members one of another. What does this mean? When does this take place? How are we joined together in such a way that we can be referred to as "the body of Christ"?

To begin with, what is the primary purpose of the physical body of a man? Is it not to give expression to his life? Life is difficult to define, even on the natural level, but we do know when a man is alive and when he is dead. When he is alive, we know it because of the expression through the body. If the body is paralyzed, and the only thing we can do is look into a man's eyes, we still know whether he is alive or not. But in that condition, the expression of life is very limited. He cannot communicate, cannot walk, and cannot accomplish anything through his faculties. He has a body, but it is not able to do what it was intended to do: express what is in his mind. To be able to express life, every faculty of the body must be connected and properly functioning under the control of the head.

We are told that Christ is the Head of His body. *"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence"* (Col. 1:18). *"But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Eph. 4:15-16). If Christ is the Head of His body, the purpose of the body of Christ is to give expression to His life according to the direction from the Head. To be able to give expression to His life, we must then be under His authority and alive with His life.

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (I Cor. 12:13). Is this not the same as what Paul says above: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"? In other words, God brings us into the Godhead by indwelling us by the Spirit. In this place of fellowship we now are truly connected to the Head (together with our brothers and sisters) and can give expression to the life of God as one body. As each member submits to the authority of Christ and moves in faith, together we will express the life of God with increasing maturity. It does not come all at once, but there will be a growth in the expression much the same as a child grows in the expression of physical life.

So how then are we made a part of "the body of Christ"? Is it not by being baptized with the Spirit into one body? That is the way we are brought into union with each other: by His life. *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20). By being united with Christ, we die to our life so we can now live His life. If we are not yet dead to our life, we will not express His life. Our calling is to express His life together as one body in the locality in which we live. This is a high calling and can only be done in the power of God, the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

I believe the reason it is so important to see this is that if we are trying to function in the body without the basis of this union, we will find ourselves struggling to do something that we cannot do. Church life can become nothing more than a series of meetings and activities we participate in with the hope of finding some encouragement. Things will start to become old after a while, and we may begin to focus on a future day when hopefully everything will be better. But victory in our present circumstances and responsibilities will likely escape us, and the fragrance of His presence that should flow from our life in the midst of trials will not be there. To fulfill this calling to be the body of Christ here on this earth, we must know union with God and the rivers of living water flowing from within. We can only know the grace of God we need if we are living His life.

## **The Way In**

So what is the way into this union with God? *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified"* (John 7:37-39). In this statement by Jesus I believe we have the essential elements God is looking for in our lives that are necessary to bring us into this union with God: thirst, come, and drink--and all of these must be done with a believing heart that is focused on Jesus as our only hope.

First of all, the call is to those who are thirsty. If we are not thirsty for more than we have now, I do not believe we will go any farther. If we are satisfied where we are, why would we want more? Here is what Jesus said to the woman at the well: *"Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'* The woman said to Him, *'Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?'* Jesus answered and said to her, *'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life'"* (John 4:10-14).

Are we defensive or thirsty? Are we justifying our position before God, or hungry for the rivers of living water? Do we know the gift of God and who gives it? Jesus told a story about two men who came before God in prayer: *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'* And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, *'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'* I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

This parable may not seem to apply to the subject at hand, but I see an attitude here that we must always maintain if we are going on in God. An attitude of self-justification in comparison to others is always wrong and leaves us in a place of stagnation. Faith is always hungry and thirsty for more of God and works out in humility before Him. Are we satisfied with Jesus? Absolutely! But should we be satisfied with only what we have experienced of Him to this point? Never! Here is what Paul said near the end of his life: *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind"* (Phil. 3:12-16).

Regardless of where we are in our relationship with God, there is always more to experience. So often our minds get in the way and we come before God to tell Him where we are instead of letting Him reveal where we are. Only God can search us out and know us. *"For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God"* (I Cor. 4:4-5). Let us be hungry and thirsty and stay before God in a place of humility where God can work.

Secondly, we must come to Jesus. He is the only one who can meet the needs of our life. He is the only one who can forgive sin. He is the only one who can baptize us with the Holy Spirit. We will stand before Him one day and give an account. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus our Lord. We must do business with Jesus.

So often we find ourselves going to another source when we have a need. We often go to another person, to a book, to our own ideas, or just don't go any place. But to come to Jesus, we must forsake

all others and come directly to Him. He says that He is there to meet us, but He does not chase after us. We find many accounts in the scripture of men and women who came to Him, determined not to be denied. There were crowds, religious leaders, physical problems, and a host of other things that could deter them. But those who were determined to press past all the barriers got to Jesus and received what they desired.

A closely related mistake is to think that by coming to the scriptures (the Bible), we have come to Jesus. We do need to use the scriptures for what they were given for--*"doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness"* according to (II Tim. 3:16)--but if that is where we stop, we stop short of life. *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life"* (John 5:39-40). We cannot get life from the Bible. We can only get life from Jesus. The scriptures point the way to Jesus and Jesus gives us life. Have we come to Jesus?

*"And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'"* (Luke 11:5-13)

Thirdly, we must drink. What does it mean to drink? When we lift a glass of water to our lips to drink, we let down all reserve and receive it into our body. What does this mean in spiritual terms? Do we not receive without reserve what Jesus offers us? We must take it within us so that our thirst may be satisfied. *"Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever'"* (John 6:53-58).

This cannot be understood by the natural mind, can it? We cannot "figure that out" and explain it to everybody. When Jesus first spoke these words, many said it was *"a hard saying,"* and *"from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more"* (John 6:66). Is this not a place where we must let down our reserves, lay aside our understanding, and come to Jesus and receive what He offers? Our natural tendency is to avoid this place. We like to stay in control, going only as far as we can understand. But if we are going to experience more of God, I believe we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us where we do not understand. *"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but*

*the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (I Cor. 2:9-12).*

Finally, Jesus says: *"He who believes in Me..."* We must thirst, come, and drink believing in Jesus. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Do we know? He is the Way into God. To believe in a doctrine (even about Jesus) is one thing, but to believe in the person of Jesus is quite another thing. He did not say that He would show us the way; He said that He is the way. The phrase "believe in Jesus" is so common to us that we can easily pass it by, assuming we know what it means. But if we search the scriptures, we find that when men have done this, something happened. The account of Cornelius in Acts 10 is an example. Faith is the way God has chosen for us to enter into the things of God, and Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6).

We may think we have believed in Jesus, but nothing happened. Beloved, we must not accuse God. God is faithful, and Jesus said that if we would believe, rivers of living water would flow from within. If the rivers are not flowing, our place is to stay before God until they do. We may not know why they are not flowing, but God does. There is no other way. Jesus is faithful. God may need to deal with us and prepare us, and we may not know what is lacking. Will He reveal? I believe He will. Will He give? He has promised to do so. Let us not pull back in unbelief, but rather draw near until we receive what we desire from God and God desires to give: Himself.

## **Hindrances**

What if we feel we have sought God but He has not answered? Perhaps we have not received what we expected. Where is the problem? What are some of the hindrances? I cannot answer every question, but I want to mention a few things that may be hindering our faith.

First of all, are we looking for a way in or a way out? In other words, are we looking to God that we may experience more or are we trying to justify our present condition or experience? I believe this can be a real problem to faith. As I have mentioned, we may know where we are in God, or we may not know. Our minds are very limited at times in being able to grasp the things of God, and we are even more limited in our ability to evaluate ourselves. Let us be sure we are not looking for evidence to justify ourselves before God. This can be deadly to faith.

Closely related to this is feeling we must justify our previous experiences with God. We may have touched God many times, and I don't believe we need to invalidate anything that has been real. God is not trying to take anything away from us that He has done, but He wants to bring us into more! Our ability to understand or explain what God has done in the past may be very limited. Praise God for every experience of God which has been a stepping stone to the present. But is God leading us into something more today?

God does not require us to deny anything of the past that was real, any more than the disciples had to deny what they knew of Jesus during His years of ministry on earth. But Jesus led them into something much greater than they had ever experienced. All the things they had experienced before Pentecost were real, and we may have had similar experiences. Do we prefer to rest in our past experiences, or are we going to know God today?

Many of us have been subjected to a wide variety of teachings on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Some have been told they received the Holy Spirit automatically when they first believed in Jesus. Others

have been told they received when they asked for the Holy Spirit, and they should just rest on the fact that God answers prayer. Still others have been told they already have the Holy Spirit but that they need the baptism in the Holy Spirit for power to serve. Because of so much confusion, maybe we don't know what to believe, so sometimes we just react by turning our backs on the subject. Whatever our particular history has been, the issue is too important for us to leave it alone and go on to other things. This is the heart of our salvation, and we must be sure of the foundation.

Frequently the focus has come down to speaking in tongues. This may be because of teaching or because of what we read in the book of Acts. It may also be because of someone's testimony or because someone told us we "must" speak in tongues. We may have known someone who did speak in tongues, but their life was a contradiction to the character of God, which may have caused us to question the validity of tongues altogether (Rom. 11:29 might be relevant here). Perhaps we have sought God for this gift but it has not come, and this has left us disappointed or struggling. But then we read in 1 Cor. 14:4, "*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...*" So I don't believe we can just dismiss tongues (v. 39).

How do we get past these hindrances? We have already looked at some basic direction from John 7:37-39. Notice that the direction pertains to the heart and obedience to God. Is God faithful? Is He faithful to us? Does He want to lead us into fullness? We can answer a confident "YES" to these questions, so we know God is not hiding from us. He is not "playing games." Here is where faith must take hold and press into God until we have the desire of our hearts. Let us not be deterred by excuses or men's ideas. God is not mixed up, and He has made the way plain. We may not understand everything, but God does. One day as we look back, we may see more clearly, but right now *do we see Jesus?* He is the author and finisher of our faith.

One area that is critical in coming to a place of faith is that of authority. "*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'"* (Matt. 28:18). "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). Search the scriptures and you will find that we are dealing with the "Lord Jesus" at every turn. God has made Him Lord, and to put ourselves in the place where we can receive from Him we must acknowledge Him as our Lord. He is the one who forgives our sins. He is the one who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. He is God, and He is sure to meet the one who comes to Him as Lord of all.

## **Evidence**

What, then, is the valid scriptural evidence that we have actually received the Holy Spirit? How do we know He has come to abide? How do we know that God has answered our prayer? Is it possible to know for sure? Let us come before God again in this matter, and ask Him to make the answer clear.

A great deal of the New Testament addresses the issue of our growth in God. I think we would all agree that there is no end to that. In the same way, the majority of ministry in the church is to encourage this growth in the life of God. It is a ministry of God's grace through every member, that we all may be encouraged and that we all may grow. But for us to benefit properly from much of the teaching in the New Testament and the ministry in the church, I believe one crucial question needs to be answered first: Have we begun in a proper union with God? In other words, we need to know that we have had our "Pentecost." Growth is essential, but first we need to know that we have begun in a real union with God.

First, I think we need to know that we are ready to obey God no matter what He reveals. *"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"* (John 7:17). Many times men say they do not know what teaching is correct, but often the reason they do not know is because they have not "willed to do His will"--trying to hide their stubbornness or unbelief behind a mask of supposed confusion. There may be times of honest confusion, but let us be convinced that God is light and that He always wants to bring us into the light where we can walk in confidence before Him.

I think the book of I John is an excellent place to go for our question about evidence. John tells us he wrote his letter that we may *know*. Read carefully what he says in light of our subject and let the Holy Spirit make it real to us: *"This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life**, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God"* (I John 5:6-13).

This instruction from John is rich with meaning. We cannot expound on it all here, but only briefly comment on some significant things. First, notice that John does not separate Jesus and the Spirit. They are one because God is one. I believe the truth laid out in many scriptures is that believing in Jesus results in the indwelling Spirit who brings us into God's life, and that when the Spirit comes He brings Jesus with Him (see John 14:23). His presence cannot be hidden and will be evident in power. It seems that so many have separated Jesus and the Spirit in a wrong way by teaching that men "have the Son" by an intellectual believing in Jesus that does not bring the Spirit into lives. But Jesus said that rivers of living water (the Spirit) would flow from the heart of the one who believes in Him.

Secondly, note that it is the Spirit who connects heaven and earth. He is the person of the Godhead who brings us into the fellowship of God. He has been "poured out" and is active in every part of our salvation: wooing us, convicting of sin, revealing Christ, leading us into all truth, indwelling the believer, and taking everything of Jesus and making it ours. Without the fullness of the Spirit we do not experience the union with God that He has provided for us.

Finally, note that John makes no place for us to separate this great salvation into compartments. He says that "the Spirit and the water and the blood" agree as one. What does this mean to us? The blood of Jesus paid the price for our sin. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said "Repent, be baptized, and you shall receive the Spirit." He did not separate the water and the Spirit. We know that participation in an outward symbol does not bring spiritual reality of itself, but a true encounter with God and response to Him brings spiritual reality and gives significance to outward symbols such as baptism.

In his letter John mentions many things that are included in this "river of living water" but in the end there is only one who can assure us that He has indeed taken up residence in the temple we have offered Him, and that is God Himself. No man can take that place, yet we must always be open for God to communicate to us through man. For example, notice this very bold statement that John makes. *"We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the*

*spirit of truth and the spirit of error"* (I John 4:6). Only the anointing from God can provide what we need. *"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him"* (I John 2:27). This "anointing" that comes with the presence of the Holy Spirit is our teacher in all things, and it is the assurance (the knowing) that God gives.

The reality of God's presence can indeed be seen. Faith that brings us into the flow of God's life also brings an observable expression of that life. There are two areas of expression mentioned in Scripture that are specifically related to the Spirit, namely 1) the fruit of the Spirit, and 2) the gifts of the Spirit. Both originate from God as evidences of His presence and both are expressed as we move in faith before God. Our purpose in mentioning these here is not to do an in-depth study of spiritual fruit and gifts, but to try to see how these may relate to the initial indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

I think we can agree that the presence of God will produce in the believer a response of worship and praise to God. We see this on the day of Pentecost as the believers were simply caught up with God. How are praise and worship expressed? Are they not primarily expressed through the tongue? When God does something for us, is not our first response to thank God and then tell others what He has done for us?

Following this thought through, note the accounts of believers in the book of Acts who spoke in tongues and magnified God when the Holy Spirit came. Were they not just overcome with the presence of God and speaking out what was coming to them with the ability that God was giving? Is this not what Peter observed? *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'"* (Acts 10:44-47) Peter was simply observing the presence of God. It was not that they "had to speak in tongues" to show they had the Holy Spirit, but rather that they were so caught up with God, they just had to speak and glorify God. The gift of tongues is a way that God has given to express our hearts to God, and the gift of prophecy is a way that God has provided to express Himself to man (I Cor. 14:2-3). Both require an exercise of faith before God.

What about other things such as love, joy, peace and so on? Were these present? We are not told, but I think we can confidently assume they were there in some measure. Why did Peter not say, "For we saw them filled with love and joy"? My own answer is what I said above: that the first thing we want to do when we sense the presence of God is thank God, and then speak to men what God is revealing to us. That is the most obvious thing for others to directly observe. All the other things pertaining to the nature of God and His presence will be there in some form, and they will increase as believers move in faith. We are told that the Spirit will work His gifts through each vessel as He wills. These differ from the fruit of the Spirit in that they are more spontaneous in order to meet an immediate need, while the fruit of the Spirit is more long-lasting inner qualities which may take longer to be evident. I believe we can say that spiritual gifts are not necessarily a mark of spirituality, but rather of the presence of God who gives the gifts.

Perhaps the reason tongues becomes the focus is because it is something unusual and beyond the normal ability of man to produce--an indication of the divine presence of God. I think we can also say that tongues and prophecy stood out to the early disciples as part of the fulfillment of the words of

Jesus in Mark 16:16-18, and a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17-18. They, like we, were looking for confirmation from God regarding their experience (see Heb. 2:4), and these were singled out as significant evidence of divine presence. Today it seems that many have dismissed these signs, some even to the point of forbidding to speak in tongues (I Cor. 14:39), whereas others have made them the ultimate verification of spirituality. I do not believe that an honest heart desirous of truth can accept either of these positions. So in our pursuit of God, let us neither diminish nor exalt God's provision in the gifts of the Spirit through our natural reasoning. God is perfect, His plan is perfect, and He has a reason for everything He does, whether we understand it or not. We cannot lay aside any element of His provision without suffering loss.

## **We Can Know**

The beginning time when we experience the rivers starting to flow in the power of God is wonderful. The specifics of that occurrence may vary from person to person depending on many things, but if we are to stay true to scripture, we need to be able to describe it as a river that starts to flow from within, characterized by power that we recognize does not come from us but from God. Jesus said this is what will happen if we drink what He gives, and I would add that we must keep on drinking. In our present discussion we are concentrating primarily on the beginning of this relationship in the Spirit. However any experience, no matter how authentic, does not serve as the "final stamp of approval" upon our lives.

We must never forget that Jesus baptizes us with the Spirit into a relationship with God, and that the relationship continues only as we walk in faith, feeding on the living word of God. It must begin sometime, but just because it begins does not mean it automatically continues. We see that clearly in the case of the Galatians. We are called to *walk* in this relationship by faith every day we are here on this earth. To point to the presence of the gifts of the Spirit as confirmation of spirituality is a great error (see Rom. 11:29). The Corinthians were not described by Paul as spiritual but rather carnal, even though they "fell short in no gift." God was among them, but their obedience to God was very sluggish. Paul rebuked them very strongly in many areas. Nevertheless, the gifts of the Spirit are part of God's provision to minister to our needs. They are for our profit and we need every one of them. Paul encouraged the believers to earnestly desire "spirituals" (or spiritual gifts), and then went on to show that to have value, they must be in the context of love, the very nature of God. Thus he commanded them to pursue love and desire spiritual gifts (I Cor. 14:1)--and we know that the source of love is the Holy Spirit (God) dwelling in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

Brothers and sisters, I think if we will just stay in a simple place before God and not complicate things with our natural thinking, we will realize that the goal is God, not gifts or fruit of the Spirit. The gifts and fruit come when God is there. Our focus is Jesus, and Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. As God comes and reveals Himself, we simply express what God is working in our hearts. This leaves us in a place of rest, not trying to "do something" but simply abiding in Jesus. Abiding in Jesus is the source of victory. When we get uptight and try to "do something" or "be somebody" or "prove something," we are pulled out of this rest and it hinders faith before God. We are called to enter into His rest.

So what if we have not experienced all of these things? Don't we want to? Don't we want to worship God with all of our hearts, in spirit and truth? Don't we want to experience the fullness of God with our brothers and sisters? We need everything God has provided for us, and we cannot "pick and choose" what we think is important. Every part of God's plan and provision for us is important. A hunger and desire for God and the things of God must motivate us to go further. I believe the truth declared in scripture is that every provision of God is available to all, but we must come to Jesus. He will not force

us, but He will meet the hungry heart. He will bless us with manifestations of His presence.

Brothers and sisters, we can know that God dwells within. We can know that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. God has provided everything we need. Let us come diligently before Him and let Him reveal Himself, for He has so much more for us, no matter where we find ourselves today. There is power in His presence. Listen to the words of Paul: *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God**"* (I Cor. 2:1-5). Let this be our heart cry also, and let us not settle for anything less. God will not disappoint us. Glory to His name!