

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

God created man with the potential to become morally good like Him. Man has chosen to go his own way and has become not good. God provided the way for us to come back to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can now become good like God even though we have sinned because the Holy Spirit helps us to appreciate what God has done for us and He enables us to benefit from all that God has provided for us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot become truly good without the help and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We have been considering major themes in the Scriptures and if we read through the Scriptures, we will be impressed with the fact that the Holy Spirit and His ministry is a major theme in the Scriptures.

There are many different aspects that the Scriptures tell us about what the Holy Spirit has done and is continuing to do and will do. My intention is to concentrate on some important aspects of this, and especially where they are directly helpful in the development of quality in our being and in our relationship with God.

First, let us consider: Who is the Holy Spirit?

Some people at times think that the Holy Spirit is just a spiritual influence, something that affects us, influences us in some way. However, in the Scriptures, it is quite clear to us that the Holy Spirit is not just a spiritual influence. He is in fact God Himself. The Holy Spirit is God.

Acts 5: 1-5

- 1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,
- 2 and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.
- 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land?"
- 4 "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."
- 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

The apostle Peter spoke to Ananias and he said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Satan had influenced Ananias, led Ananias to do what he did, but that was because Ananias himself had a desire in that direction, so Satan was effective. Peter said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land?"

We can see from the context that the apostle Peter was not saying that Ananias must give all that he had sold and the price of it to the apostles, but he was pretending; he was lying. He wanted to give the impression that he had given all when in reality, he had kept back some of the price of the land. And so, Peter said, "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?" So God did not demand that Ananias must give all that he had. He should give according to what he sincerely found meaningful to do and do it honestly, but he did not. So Peter said, "You have not lied to men but to God."

So in this short passage, the apostle Peter referred to Ananias as having lied to the Holy Spirit and then he said, "You have lied to God." So we can see that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God. But we may ask why is it in this context, the apostle Peter mentioned lying to the Holy Spirit rather than just mention lying to God.

From what I can see in the record of the Acts of the Apostles, it is quite evident that the ministry of the Holy Spirit was very prominent in the Acts of the Apostles. It was the time of Pentecost when God had poured forth His Spirit in accordance with His intention and His promise. It is the Holy Spirit who will lead the people, first to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and then to work in accordance with God's will by the power of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit was involved in leading the church, in guiding the people as to how they should work out the purposes of God. What Ananias did would hinder the work of God and he was lying to the Holy Spirit who was in charge of this whole operation.

So we see that the Holy Spirit is God Himself.

He is also called the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 12: 3

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

So basically, the apostle Paul was saying: If one says "Jesus is accursed", in terms of the meaning of it, it cannot be from the Holy Spirit, it cannot be by the Spirit of God. If one is led by the Spirit of God, he will never say, "Jesus is accursed". On the other hand, it is also true no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit, that is, no one can properly say, "Jesus is Lord" and mean it, except by the Holy Spirit. And He is also called the Spirit of God.

The apostle Paul also tells us that the Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ.

Romans 8: 9-11

- 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.
- 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.
- 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So we have seen that the Spirit of God is also the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul tells us that if we belong to Christ, then the Spirit of God dwells in us. And then he says, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." So the Spirit of God dwelling in us is the same as the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, is the same as the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

And so he goes on to say, "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness."

So Christ dwelling in us comes about through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand, appreciate who the Lord Jesus is and He works to bring about a transformation in our lives so that Christ is formed in us.

So he goes on to say, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,” (“the Spirit of Him”, the word “Him” here refers to God), so, “if the Spirit of Him [that is God] who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead [that is, God], will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” So God will give His Spirit to us so that He can dwell in us and He can give life to our mortal bodies.

As we go on to consider who the Holy Spirit is and what He does, it may become clearer to us why He is referred to as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.

The Scriptures show to us many different aspects in the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He was present in the creation of this world.

He enabled people to do things that they would not be able to do on their own, so that they could fulfil God’s purposes. For example, God told Moses that He filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God so that he would have wisdom, he would have skill, so that he could work in articles of gold and silver and bronze and also the cutting of stones, in the course of the work of building, constructing, the Tabernacle.

God gave gifts; God enabled through the Holy Spirit various ones to fulfil His purposes.

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of the LORD and He came upon Samson to empower him, so that he could be a judge for the nation of Israel and deliver the people from their enemies.

In the Scriptures, we see again and again the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. God wanted to communicate many things to the people, and He would speak through the Holy Spirit enabling the prophets to communicate what God wanted to say.

In the Scriptures, we also see that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Scriptures in accordance with the will of God. The Holy Spirit enabling the people to write the Scriptures does not mean that whatever is written in the Scriptures, all the sentences are meant for us to follow as they stand. What it means is that God inspired the writing of the Scriptures through the power of the Holy Spirit leading people, so that the record of the Scriptures is what God intends for us to read.

But the Scriptures also record for us the thoughts, the ideas, the actions, of many people who went the wrong way. The **book of Ecclesiastes** records for us many ideas and thoughts that are not right. It talks about the thinking of the man under the sun: the man who does not truly follow God but depends on his natural abilities, seeking for the things of the world. And there are various aspects there that we must not follow in terms of what is specified in the **book of Ecclesiastes**. They are expressions of Solomon in terms of his search for meaning and his failures and his faltering.

So too in the **Psalms**: We read of people who expressed various ideas and thoughts that were not in accordance with what would be most meaningful before God. The Scriptures also tell us: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" "

So we do not follow whatever is written in the Scriptures as they stand on their own, but we must know the context, the intention of God.

However, when it comes to clear teachings in the Scriptures, specific statements that are indicated as God's intention for us, the will of God, what the prophets said, what the apostles said as God enabled them to speak on His behalf, these are aspects that God intends for us to follow and to obey. So when God spoke through the prophets and they said, "Thus says the LORD", these are words from God and they must take heed. So too the apostles wrote and gave instructions as to how we should live our lives and how God has called the church to function - these are aspects that are authoritative, that are meant for us to obey.

So God inspired the Scriptures so that in the record of the Scriptures of many different people, their experiences, their responses, we can learn and understand about man and his failures, his rebellion, his evil thoughts and they are written for our instruction, for our learning. We are not to follow the ways of evil men, but we are to follow the examples of those who are positive, who are good, where they truly obey God and honour Him.

Then we see that the Holy Spirit empowered the Lord Jesus to live in this world as the perfect Man. The Holy Spirit came upon Him when He started His public ministry. But even before that, we are told that Mary conceived as a result of the Holy Spirit coming upon her. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is critical in the life of the Lord Jesus as the perfect Man. He empowered Him in the things that He did, and it is through the Spirit He offered Himself as the perfect Sacrifice.

So the Holy Spirit was involved in the life of the Lord Jesus as He led Him through the time of temptation in the wilderness, and as He led Him through the years of ministry and in the event of the cross.

The Holy Spirit then speaks to mankind and He helps us to come to God in repentance and faith, helping us to be convicted of our sins, to recognize our need of God, to turn to God, so that we can be born again, born of the Spirit. He is the One who leads us in this direction, so that we can be born of the Spirit, born from above, and we can be renewed in the process in which we are transformed to be like God.

Then we are told that the Holy Spirit was a promise given by God that at the event of Pentecost, He would come in a special way into this world, in a new phase in God's working, associated with the new covenant. And in this context, we are told the Lord Jesus baptizes His disciples with the Holy Spirit, to empower them to do His work, and this is associated with the event of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit came into this world in a special way after the Lord Jesus left. After the event of the cross and His resurrection, God poured forth the Holy Spirit upon all mankind in an event, in a manner in which He sought to help us to come to Him, to know Him, His power, His kingdom, His reign, His realm, so that we can walk with God and know Him deeply and personally.

The Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the body of Christ. He is the One who brings together the spiritual body of Christ, so that we can work out church life. He gives spiritual gifts to members of the body of Christ so that each one can contribute his part in the church. He is the One who leads and guides and empowers believers in working out church life. He calls and He sends out those He chooses to do His work. In all this, He seeks to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. He helps us to understand Him, He glorifies Christ and He prepares the church to be a holy and blameless bride for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So there are many different aspects in which the Holy Spirit has been at work.

In the midst of all this, I see that the most amazing and the most wonderful and the most meaningful aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the impartation of the life and the character of God to us, so that we can be truly good like God. This is at the heart of God's purpose in His creation of this universe and in His creation of Man.

Many people are impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in many ways. They are impressed with miraculous deeds, experiences, works of power that come from God as the Holy Spirit works, and many people are attracted to these aspects and they may think that this will help them to become spiritual. Many are very preoccupied with such spiritual manifestations.

However, when we look carefully at what is in the heart of God, we know that the most precious, the most meaningful aspect and what is at the heart of God's intention in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to help us to become like Him, that the character of God, the life of God can be imparted to us, His creation, His creatures. In spite of our having gone our own way, the Holy Spirit continues to work to help us to move in this direction.

So let us look at this aspect first before we consider more fully the various aspects of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures tell us that God is spirit.

For us, we are very conscious of the physical. How do you recognize that this person is John or Stephen or Michael or Jennifer or Agnes? How do you recognize them? By looking at their face!

Basically, that is how we recognize people. In a physical realm, we look at the physical appearance and we recognize them as such.

What if one day, your friend Michael has a face transplant and the face is no longer the same? Will you recognize him, will you know him? He now looks like John. Will you call him John? The answer, of course we know, is that he is still Michael. His face looks like John but he is Michael. Why? Because his character, his life, his being is in his heart, is in his spirit, not in the body: The body is the outward expression of what is in his heart and he communicates through the body in various ways, but the character of the person is in his spirit. So even if you have a face transplant, your heart will still remain the same.

So in order to be like God, we must appreciate God as He is in spirit. God is spirit and His moral character and His moral perfection is manifested from His Spirit. So although God became Man and we can see Him living as a Man in this world, doing the things that we do, yet, the reality of God is not primarily seen in His face in the physical realm: It is seen in the spirit with which He lived out His life in this body. The character of God is seen in the life of the Lord Jesus in terms of the meaning of His heart, in terms of what He was concerned about, in terms of His attitude, His values and how He lived.

Many of us are very concerned about physical appearance. So much time, energy and money is spent just to look pretty, to look handsome, to look good, in the physical realm. But all this is of no value if your heart is not right. Of course, there is some value in taking care of your body so that it looks good because it is healthy. But beyond being healthy and being useful to God in the physical realm, we need to be careful that ultimately, our concentration is on the development of our spirit.

God is spirit and if we are to develop quality in our being, to be like God, we must develop moral goodness in our spirit even though we dwell in a physical body.

John 4: 19-24

- 19 The woman *said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.
- 20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."
- 21 Jesus *said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.
- 22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.
- 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.
- 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman of Samaria spoke to the Lord Jesus and she said, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." And then she said two things which the Lord Jesus addressed. She said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, but you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." So there are two aspects here that she raised. One was "our fathers" compared with "you *people*", that is: "The people of Samaria, our fathers, they worshipped... that was their way; that was what they did." Then the other aspect is: "We worship in this mountain, but you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship".

So the Lord Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." So first, He addressed the issue: The place is not the place – neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem. True worship is not limited by the physical place. It is in the realm of the spirit. It is not the physical place that is primary. But that does not mean that the place is of no importance. God did ask the people to worship in Jerusalem; there was a temple there. But true worship is in the heart, in the spirit.

So people can worship in Jerusalem and yet not truly worship God. People can worship far away from Jerusalem and still truly worship God. So He said, "...neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father."

Then He said, "You worship what you do not know... Your fathers taught you what to do, but they did not know. They were not worshipping according to God's instructions and revelation, according to the truth that God had shown. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" – for God has revealed to the Jews and God's instructions are given to them; God's revelation is given to them, so they know what is the truth.

And so He says, "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." We must worship in spirit. We do not worship on the basis of the place. We worship in the realm of the spirit and that has to do with our heart. It is not our body, but the expression in our body is important when our heart is right. So we cannot say that the body is of no importance: The body is important, but it becomes important only when first we make sure that we worship in spirit. Our worship of God must be in spirit. And it must be in truth, in accordance with God's revelation. They did not know what they were worshipping: they were not following the right path. They must do it in accordance with God's instructions, God's revelation.

"...for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." So God is spirit. If you want to worship God, you must learn to worship in the realm of the spirit, not concentrating on the physical and the outward, but the development of the quality of the heart. That is where you truly worship God. And you must worship in truth, according to what God has revealed, what He has taught, and what He has shown how we are to live.

So if we are to become like God, we must first learn to appreciate Him in His moral perfection and His sovereign greatness, and then choose to worship Him and follow Him. This is the critical part.

We cannot be transformed to be like God unless we appreciate Him, we recognize who He is, and we want to be like Him, we choose to follow Him, we are committed to follow Him.

This takes place in the realm of our spirit. It is not just in the realm of words, or just physical outward actions in themselves. It is in the realm of our heart, it is in the realm of the spirit. So we must learn to worship in the realm of the spirit and in accordance with God's revelation and instructions to us.

And it is the Holy Spirit who will teach us to do that. It is the Holy Spirit who will lead us and help us to understand what this means and He will enable us to live that way.

Philippians 3: 1-3

- 1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.
- 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;
- 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...

The phrase "worship in the Spirit of God" can also be translated as "worship by the Spirit of God". So if we are to worship God, we must worship in the realm of the spirit and we must worship by the Spirit of God. He is the One who will teach us how to worship God. We do not worship God just as we wish, according to our own thinking, our own ways and our own desires. God is holy and God is perfect, and if we are to worship Him, we must learn to follow Him, listen to Him, and this is in contrast with the flesh.

“...we... glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...” “The flesh” refers to the self-life, going our own way, doing things according to our own natural ability, according to what we think is good without proper submission to God. So that kind of worship will be false worship. We may say we love God but in reality, we do not. To truly love God, we must listen to Him; we must seek to understand what is in His heart and how we are to live.

So although the Holy Spirit is the One who will teach us how to worship God, it is very clear that this requires our positive response. Our heart must become pure through the positive response to God in the context of the working of the Holy Spirit in our heart. The Holy Spirit speaks to our heart. We must respond, we must choose, we must want the will of God and the ways of God. It is in the realm of our spirit, our heart, that we truly worship God.

The apostle Paul put it this way in **Romans 2: 28-29**:

Romans 2: 28-29

- 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.
- 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

The Jews took pride in many of the things that they did: their heritage, the revelation of God through Moses, and the many ceremonies that they had. They were people called out by God and so they took pride in these things, the outward forms; and they were “the people of the circumcision”. But Paul says, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.” They may be a Jew outwardly, physically, but they would not be a true Jew in the eyes of God in the sense of a spiritual Jew, one who belongs to God, who loves God, who walks in God’s way.

So he says: "...he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter". It is not the outward forms of things but it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. The circumcision... which is of the heart, by the Spirit, that is to say, we receive and respond to the working of the Holy Spirit in our heart and we are prepared to deal with that which is not good in the eyes of God – we discard that so that we can become pure. Circumcision... which is of the heart, by the Spirit: So it is the Holy Spirit who works in us but it requires our response.

So what then is the development of our spirit? This is an area that is very, very important and also full of danger.

Some people, they think the realm of the spirit means spiritual experiences, spiritual activities and because of that, many people become involved in various spiritual experiences and they think that this means development of the spirit. They may say, "The physical, the outward forms of things, are not the primary thing; it is in the realm of the spirit that we must develop." So they seek for spiritual experiences, whether it be in the realm of miracles or other forms in which they experience supernatural working.

But this is not true – that spiritual experiences make you spiritual in a positive sense.

Spiritual experiences can come from God, but spiritual experiences can also come from the evil one. They can also come from angels. There are many different kinds of manifestations that we may experience in the spiritual realm, but these experiences in themselves do not make us spiritual, and morally good. If we have the wrong emphasis, it can lead to destruction in our lives because the evil one is very active in the spiritual realm and if we have the wrong values and wrong concerns, then we can get very involved in the wrong areas.

So first, we need to recognize the development of the spirit must involve our attitude and our values and our commitment – that are based on what is truly morally good and in accordance with what is meaningful to God in what He is seeking to bring about in this universe. If this is absent, then all our experiences will not do us any good. It must have this element if there is to be development of our spirit because our spirit is in reality our heart, and in our heart reside the moral values, the attitude that we have, the direction of our lives, what we are committed to, what we want to give ourselves for.

So, we must have the right attitude, we must have the right values, we must choose to be properly committed to God and His ways, and what He wants to bring about. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps us and enables us to do that. It is the Holy Spirit who will teach us God's ways, who will show us the path of righteousness, of goodness. He is the One who will strengthen us, enable us to become what we ought to be. Spiritual experiences by themselves cannot do that.

So as we are sensitive to what God has to say, as we desire what is good and the Holy Spirit speaks to us, then as we respond to Him, He will transform us.

So the primary aspect that is important in our spirit is not the spiritual realm in itself, but the moral values in our heart: what we are seeking for in life, what we base our choices on, whether we are self-giving, honest and humble or we are self-seeking, dishonest and proud. And this is our heart, this is our spirit.

Development of our spirit is primarily in the moral and spiritual realm.

So although we have a spirit, it does not mean that we have moral and spiritual life of quality in ourselves, in our spirit.

We have a spirit, a spirit that can be active. But the Lord Jesus tells us that although we have a spirit, we do not have spiritual life in ourselves. We do not have spiritual quality of character in our spirit until we come to God. That quality of life must be imparted to us from God; it must come from our choice to worship God, to submit to Him, to come to Him for His life. And this comes to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through our becoming united with the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 6: 53

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."

The Lord Jesus here is telling us something very important. God has created us with a spirit and a body, but He did not give us spiritual life in our spirit when He created us because that is not possible. The spiritual life has to come about through our moral choice. We cannot become morally good without any moral choice on our part. God cannot impart His Spirit to us without our asking for it, without our wanting it.

The moral character is the result of our moral choice. So when God created us, although our spirit is active, it exists, it functions, it does not have spiritual life. The Lord Jesus said, "you have no life in yourselves".

So how do we obtain that life? He says, "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves".

Of course, we know the Lord Jesus was not referring to eating His physical flesh and drinking His physical blood.

He is talking about partaking of His life, partaking of His Spirit – drinking of His life so that the life of God can become part of us. And this we can do only by choice: we want it.

So we cannot make people Christians. We cannot force people to become Christians. People must choose to repent. They must choose to want to follow Christ. They must choose to want to be good. We cannot make them good just by compulsion, by threats, or by inducements, by attractions. We have to help them recognize that they must give up the way of the world, the way of the flesh and they must come to God because they want to be good.

So this life comes to us in the spiritual realm. It is life from the Spirit of God, from the Spirit of Christ.

So the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, because He brings the life of God to us, He brings the life of Christ to us. What we see in the being of Christ as He lived on earth, the way He lived in such a wonderful manner, it can become ours in our heart, in our being, if we receive the Spirit of Christ and He works in us and transforms us.

John 6: 63

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life..."

So it is the Spirit who gives life. It is the Holy Spirit who will give life to us. He is the One who will help us to partake of the life of God so that we can become like God in His moral goodness. The flesh profits nothing. The flesh can be very clever, can be very intelligent, can be very capable; we can understand many things, but the flesh profits nothing. If we do not receive life from God, it is useless.

On the other hand, we may not be clever, we may not be able in the things of this world but if our heart longs for what is good, if we are humble, we come to God to help us, God will give us of His Spirit. That is why the Pharisee who thought that he was so good, he was so righteous, he tithed, he prayed, he did so many spiritual things, yet he will go away condemned. But the tax collector, so unworthy, having done so many wrong things, but honest, repentant, coming to God and crying out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" he will be forgiven, he will be justified. God will give of His Spirit to him. The flesh profits nothing.

So the Lord Jesus said, "...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life..." If you want life, then you must come and listen to what the Lord Jesus has to say because when the Lord Jesus speaks, the Holy Spirit comes forth, the life of God comes forth, the Spirit of Christ will go forth to help us understand the spiritual realm and meaning. And if we receive that, the word of God, and we receive with a good heart, it will bear fruit. The seed is the word of God. The Lord Jesus is the *Logos* and that is the Word. And when He speaks, there is life and there is spirit. So the Lord Jesus, as He speaks, the Spirit of life will come forth.

And so then, when we believe in the Lord Jesus, when we truly trust Him, we are repentant, we are committed to Him, then we become partakers of the Holy Spirit. We drink of the Spirit and in drinking of the Spirit, we will be drinking the blood of Christ; we will be drinking His life, so that He can be formed in us.

1 Corinthians 12: 13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

So all those who truly repent, who trust in the Lord Jesus, they will be baptized into one body: that is, the body of Christ.

It is a spiritual body. It is a spiritual exercise, spiritual operation where God brings us, our spirit, into the body of Christ in the spiritual realm; and it does not matter whether you are Jew or Greek, whether you are slave or free. We will all be united in the body of Christ and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

We drink of the Spirit means we partake of the Holy Spirit, we partake of the blood of Christ; we eat of His flesh, we drink of His blood. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and as we partake of the Spirit, we are partaking of the life of Christ, and as a result of this, Christ can be formed in us. So the meaning of drinking of the Spirit is the same as partaking of the divine nature, that is, the life and the character of God, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Saviour, and our Life.

2 Peter 1: 2-8

- 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;
- 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.
- 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.
- 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge,
- 6 and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness,
- 7 and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.
- 8 For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter tells us that God has given us His magnificent promises, precious and magnificent promises, so that by them we may become partakers of *the* divine nature: That is to say, we can partake of the life of God, the character of God, we can drink of the Spirit - Christ can be formed in us. God has made this provision so every one of us created in the image of God can become like God in reality, in being, in moral goodness.

But it is very important for us to recognize that partaking of the divine nature is not a passive experience. It is not a situation where we just come to God and say, "God, I want to partake of the divine nature. I hereby partake of the divine nature; and make me like Yourself", and then we just wait and we will be transformed to be like God. It is not like that.

It is true that we must partake of the divine nature; it is true that we need the life of God, we need the Holy Spirit to come. We need God to give us His life and character. But the apostle Peter says, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence".

Yes, we come to God in faith, we trust Him, we believe in Him. If it is genuine faith, if you are truly coming to God in repentance and faith, you are prepared to be committed to Him, then he says, "You must apply all diligence". That means you must work hard. There is something that you must do. It is not something where you can just say, "I want to be" and you become. Who ever becomes a champion badminton player or tennis player just by saying, "I want to be" and he becomes? They all have to work very hard to develop that.

But the danger of course is that we work very hard without God, we work very hard without depending on Him and we become very proud in all that we have done. No, we apply all diligence in the context of God's provision, in the midst of God's grace, the Holy Spirit working in our midst. But we must apply all diligence.

And so the apostle Peter tells us the different qualities that we will develop if we apply diligence in the right way: moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. These are just some examples of moral qualities.

It is not a comprehensive list but it tells us that it is the moral realm that is important and we have to work at it. We have to deal with our lives, we have to correct the things that are wrong, we have to repent, we have to confess, we have to be cleansed, we have to be renewed, we have to be transformed.

We must work hard in responding well to God and to what He has provided. And this takes place in the context of His provision and His grace. The apostle Paul understood this very clearly in his own life.

1 Corinthians 15: 10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

This is a helpful verse for us to remember and to ponder over again and again. It will help us to maintain the right attitude and understanding in terms of spiritual development.

“By the grace of God I am what I am”: Whatever we can develop that is truly good and meaningful, we know it is in the context of the grace of God. We have sinned; we have gone our own way; God in His grace reached out to us to help us, and the Holy Spirit spoke to us and taught us, enabled us. Yes, we must work hard but we are working hard in the context of God’s grace.

So the apostle Paul said, “His grace toward me did not prove vain”. God’s grace toward us can prove vain. If we neglect it, if we are not diligent, if we ignore it, if we are lazy, if we allow other things to occupy us in our heart, then His grace may prove vain in our lives.

So he said, ““His grace toward me did not prove vain but I labored even more than all of them”.

He laboured very hard because he was so grateful; he was so convinced that this is so very important he must work hard to develop his life. And that is why Paul went all out. He gave everything. He counted all things as rubbish in order to gain Christ. And "to gain Christ" means, in a major aspect, to become like Him, that Christ would be formed in him, that he would live for His glory and in accordance with His purposes and by His power.

But again he says, "...yet not I, but the grace of God with me". He laboured, but not by himself. He laboured, but not for his own glory. He laboured in the context of the grace of God. God enabled him through the Holy Spirit working in him. He depended on the Holy Spirit. Right at the very beginning of God's call to his life, the apostle Paul experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias came and spoke to him, laid his hands on him, so that he could be filled with the Holy Spirit, that he could be baptized and he could be sent forth to be an apostle for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we need to understand that this aspect of partaking of the divine nature, of the life of God - the character of God becoming our own - is a central aspect in what God wants to give to us and to transform us.

It is only in that context that the purposes of God can be properly worked out. God wants to develop a high quality relationship with each one of us in the best meaning of friendship. He wants to develop that quality with all of us as members of the body of Christ. He wants us to develop a meaningful relationship with one another in the body of Christ and all this can come about only if we develop that quality of being like God in His moral goodness. But to develop that quality takes time, effort, and it may involve much pain, many tears and struggles. If we are not prepared for that, we will not be able to develop.

This whole process of properly partaking of the divine nature and becoming transformed to be like God, requires our response in the deepest way, but at the same time, it requires the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts: from bringing the gospel to us to help us understand our need and what the Lord Jesus has done for us, to helping us to be born again and then to know the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to live for God and becoming sanctified through His working in our hearts continuously until Christ is formed in us.

All this is the work of the Holy Spirit and we need to learn to cooperate with Him, to respond well so that He has the freedom to work in us, that He will not be grieved.

If we choose to go our own way after having known the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will be grieved and when He is grieved, He will not be working in our hearts as He intends to do and we will degenerate, we will follow the world, we will crumble, we will dry up, we will be like a branch that becomes useless and we may be burnt. So we must not be presumptuous. We must be humble, we must be dependent on God, keep coming to Him; we must learn to pray always and seek His enabling; and God is very pleased to give to us all that is necessary so that we can be partakers of the divine nature.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must choose to love God and His ways and we must learn to receive the life of God through the Holy Spirit and be taught by Him and walk each step with Him, being truly committed to God and His perfect will.

The Holy Spirit is a major theme in the Scriptures but we can easily misunderstand what He is seeking to do. We can seek for the wrong things and it can lead to disaster.

If we understand correctly, we come to God in the right way, we will find life and meaning and freedom: the power of God to transform us, God's presence with us in everything that we go through. The apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me". "Him" refers to the Lord Jesus; "Him" refers to the Holy Spirit through whom the Lord Jesus will work in our lives. We can do all things through Him who strengthens us. The Holy Spirit will strengthen us no matter what the task, no matter what the situation. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. We overwhelmingly conquer. Why? Because of the power of God, the life of God, the Spirit of God, but it requires our response to Him; we must be prepared to go all the way with Him. Then He will find it meaningful to help us and to work in our lives.

The Lord willing, we will consider other aspects in terms of the work, the ministry of the Holy Spirit that can help us to appreciate what He is seeking to do and how we can benefit from God's provision. And as we look at all these various areas, we will realize that they all bear a relationship with this primary aspect: that God wants to impart His life and character to us so that we can participate fully in all that He wants to accomplish.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us to understand the issues more deeply, to help us appreciate who He is, that we may truly want to worship Him, choose to worship Him and follow Him and in so doing, learn to depend on the Holy Spirit. And God in His almighty greatness and power will help us to walk in His ways. If we make sure that our heart is completely His, then God has promised that He in His sovereign greatness and power will strongly support those whose heart is completely His.