

# GOD'S CALL

## Major themes in the Scriptures

### The Holy Spirit (20)

#### Freedom in the Spirit: transformed by God

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the twentieth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures. A short summary of today’s message:

God wants us to know true freedom in all its fullness. However, this is developed progressively in different areas. There are greater depths and higher levels of freedom in the Spirit that we can enter into in our experience. Ultimately, God wants us to be transformed such that the deepest freedom is our constant way of life because we have become like Him in His being.

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

True freedom is something very, very precious that all of us long for if we appreciate meaning in life. True freedom is what God wants to give to us so that our life will have value, meaning and purpose for eternity. And we have seen that true freedom, at the heart of it, is the power to be what we should be and to do what we should do.

We have considered different levels of experience of this freedom as we develop, as we grow, and we can experience freedom from condemnation by God because of our sins as we come to Him for forgiveness. This experience can grow in depth and meaning. So too the experience of freedom from condemnation within our hearts – we can experience this in different degrees and depths as we learn to give of ourselves more to God and as we experience His power in our lives.

But ultimately what we should be more concerned about is not just these experiences. Experiences can come; they can go. They may be passing in our lives quite rapidly and one experience can be replaced by another. One moment, we can be very grateful to God for His forgiveness; the next moment, our hearts may be filled with condemnation. Why is that so?

That is because experience is different from transformation of our being. It is in the transformation of our being that our character is developed; our being becomes more and more like that of God, it becomes more and more consistent. So when our being is transformed to a very high quality, then we will find that our experiences become more and more consistent. Our experience of God's forgiveness becomes a constant feature in our lives. We are grateful to Him every day in each situation that we go through. The experience of His freedom to overcome sin, the power to live for God becomes a regular feature in our lives because God has transformed us.

So what we want to concentrate on today is to consider freedom in the Spirit as a result of having been transformed by God. What would this mean and how does this come about?

Let us turn to **2 Corinthians 3: 18**.

**2 Corinthians 3: 18**

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Here I want to concentrate on the aspect of being transformed. What are we transformed from and to?

We are told that we are being transformed into the same image. What is that same image? In the context, it is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ: the glory of the Lord, the perfection of His character, the glory of His being.

When God created man, He created man in His image, but that meaning is quite different from the meaning here. When God created man in His image, man was morally neutral: there was no moral quality in his being yet. He was given the freedom to make his moral choice: what he would become, what he would want to be.

Then why was it described as being created in the image of God? That basically is a reference to the potential to become like God. We are created with that potential and within that potential, a very major primary aspect is the power of moral choice. We are not just physical objects; we are not non-moral beings.

We are moral beings like God. God makes His moral choices arising from His moral perfection. We came into this world morally neutral. It is up to us how we want to develop our being.

On the other hand, the Scriptures describe the Lord Jesus as the image of God. Here the reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ expressing, containing within Himself, the fullness of the character of God, the moral perfection of God.

So in **2 Corinthians 3: 18**, we are to be transformed into the same image, that is, to be transformed to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. And the description of being like the Lord Jesus Christ is here said in this form: the glory of the Lord.

The apostles, they beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ when He dwelt amongst them. Here as we come before the Lord, as we come to appreciate Him, as we come to know Him, increasingly we will behold the glory of the Lord.

And if we approach it in the right way then we can be transformed into the same image. That means we are transformed to become like the Lord Jesus Christ in His moral perfection. But for us, the development of our moral quality is intended to continue to grow through all eternity. No matter how far we have developed to know the glory of the Lord in our lives, God wants us to continue to develop from glory to glory, from one level of glory to another level.

We are finite beings; God is infinite. For us to become like God, we must continue to receive His life to be more and more like Him in increasing substance in our being. So we are to develop that from glory to glory. That is what we should be looking for and if we develop that, if we are transformed in that way, we will find the fullness of freedom in the Spirit.

How then does this come about? We are to be transformed from something to something else. We are transformed to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. What are we transformed from?

The apostle Paul describes this very meaningfully for us to appreciate so that we understand what we need to get out of and what we need to get into. We need to be transformed from something that is not good to something that is extremely good.

**Ephesians 4: 17-24**

- 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,
- 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;
- 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.
- 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,
- 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,
- 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
- 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
- 24 and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The apostle Paul urged the believers not to continue in the way that they used to live. He said, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk..." "no longer" means they used to walk in that way. "No longer do so; do not continue in this way of life." This is a reference to their way of life, the way they walked in daily life. It is a description of how people live their lives when they do not follow God, do not live for Him, do not depend on Him.

So here the apostle Paul describes what he calls "Gentiles". Here the emphasis is not just whether they are Jews or non-Jews, but the manner of life characteristic of many of these people in that context. What is it that is wrong with their lives?

If we look at life in a context where people do not submit to God, we can see obviously manifestations of many aspects that are very negative. And even in situations that may appear positive, underlying it there are also various motives that are not pure.

That is because when we turn away from God, when we do not submit to God who is perfect morally, we cannot be morally perfect. We do not have life in ourselves; so we go our own way, our lives will be corrupted by negative desires. So whether it be inconsiderateness, unkindness, theft and robbery, cheating, deception, whatever form that we can see that is negative, they can be expressed in the way we live each day.

So then how do we change?

In many instances people try to change by seeking to change their conduct, their manner of life, the things that they often do that are not right.

So for example, a person who is a thief, we tell him, "Do not steal anymore." A person who is a liar, we tell him, "Do not lie anymore." So too with many other things that are wrong, we tell them, "Do not do this anymore." If they listen to you, they work very hard, they may succeed to some extent. They try not to steal for a while, they try not to be inconsiderate but soon you will find that the problem is not resolved. It continues to surface when they are not so much on guard and they find it very tiresome to keep on trying to do what actually they are not inclined to do.

So just trying to change your outward conduct may not ultimately result in a true change that is necessary. Why is this so?

The apostle Paul says: "...that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind..." "the futility of their mind" tells us that something must change in their mind if they are to change their manner of walking. If the mind does not properly change, then though they may change in their outward conduct for a period of time, they will continue to go back to that former way of life.

So what is this "futility of their mind"? "being darkened in their understanding": the mind does not have the light of God; they are walking in darkness. That is why the way they live may at times appear good but in reality it is not good.

The Lord Jesus Christ, before He came into this world, He created the world; the world was made by Him. And we are told: in Him was life and the life was the light of men. This light came into the world to shine in the darkness. Without the light of God, we will walk in darkness.

And so they are "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God": they do not have the life of God shining into their lives to give them light, understanding. Here it is a reference to the moral and spiritual understanding of true and ultimate value.

He says: "...because of the ignorance that is in them". That ignorance here is not a reference to their intellectual ability: how smart they are, how knowledgeable they are in terms of their reasoning process or their knowledge of the things of the world. In fact, many people who are very intelligent are very ignorant in this area. In terms of true spiritual understanding, they are darkened because they depend on their natural understanding. So they say, "There is no God. I cannot see Him. I go to outer space, He is still not there. There is no God."

They can reason along their own ways. They do not understand, they do not have the life of God.

So then we may think we need to educate them: teach them the ways of God, show to them the right path to take. So we can teach them, show them, they may agree and they try and they may succeed to a certain extent. But again we find that they go back to their old way of life very easily. Why? The answer lies in the final part of what the apostle Paul says: "...because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart".

All this comes from the root: the hardness of their heart. Why is the mind darkened? It is because of the hardness of the heart. Why is there the walking in the wrong path? It is because of the futility of the mind because of the hardness of the heart. So if we do not deal with this problem at its roots, we cannot help a person at the deepest level. What we can do may be to avoid some unpleasantness, some more serious evil and crime but we cannot transform the person to become what he ought to be.

In order to do that, we must deal with the hardness of the heart.

And here, the "hardness of the heart" refers to what we truly want deep in our hearts; what we long for; what we strive for; what we seek for: what is it? "Hardness of... heart" here tells us that the person has hardened his heart against what God offers; he does not want the path that God has offered to him. He hardens his heart. That is why the writer to the Hebrews says: "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

We can harden our hearts very readily to what God is saying.



Even though we may not be so very conscious of it, it can become a way of life. When we hear something right and good, we do not want to pay attention to that because we know there is a cost to it – we must do something about it, we need to change our lives. We are not prepared to do that, so we let it pass. Sometimes we may even say, “Very good; very good” but it does not reach our hearts, it does not change our lives. So if it does not deal with the hardness of heart then we cannot be transformed into the image of Christ.

So what is this hardness of heart? The apostle Paul says: “...and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness”. “...having become callous”: the word “callous” means they have lost all feeling; it does not matter anymore; they do not care anymore – hardened. “...having become callous”: no longer sensitive to what God has to say, conscience being seared.

So they have given themselves over to sensuality. “...given themselves” tells us it refers to a choice that they make; a direction of life: what they are seeking for, what they want. This is at the heart of the problem: they have given themselves over to sensuality. And sensuality has to do with our feelings, our inclinations, what we may like or dislike.

They have given themselves over to live by their feelings rather than by moral meaning. This is at the heart of the problem.

We like something; we feel it, we enjoy it, we want it, we choose it. This can occur in any realm, whether in the obviously physical realm or in the mental realm or even in the spiritual realm.

Why do many people pursue the gifts of the Spirit so very intensely and out of all proportion to its meaning? It is because it is enjoyable. There are various aspects that we can enjoy in that context.

So too with spiritual experiences, miracles, God's working. Of course when God gives miracles, gifts of the Spirit, it is for a good purpose. There is a place for it and He wants us to benefit.

But very often we have approached it in the wrong way, just as the apostle Paul mentioned about the Corinthians. They had many gifts but they were quarrelling amongst themselves; they were carnal.

That is not what God intends. God wants us to concentrate on the way of excellence: moral and spiritual, divine love, and in that context, exercise the gifts; look to God for His working in different situations.

So they have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. "...impurity" can also be translated as "uncleanness". "...greediness" can be translated as "covetousness". So in various ways, we see that these are characteristic of the self-life, the natural man: he seeks what is advantageous to himself, what he wants to get even though it is not properly his, and is prepared to do so, as people say, "by hook or by crook".

So then he says, "But you did not learn Christ in this way": the contrast. That is what we were, that is what we used to be (or it should be used to be). The problem is much of this may still remain in our lives if we do not deal with them deeply enough. Though we are Christians, though we want to be like Christ, we may still be harbouring much of these desires and ways that are of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.

"...you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self..."

So, if we have learnt from Christ, we must change; and that is, we must lay aside the old self or it can be translated as the “old man”. We are to be transformed from one person to another person. We are to become a different person, not in the sense of a transplant (that you take something from elsewhere that is not yours at all and it just suddenly becomes yours – you have a different kidney that is totally not yours) but here, it is a transformation as a result of our absorption of the life of God because we want it and we integrate that into our lives, and we reject all that is negative that we used to have.

So it is by choice that we are transformed by the power of God. We lay aside the old man – we are to lay aside, we must make that choice.

“...which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit...” The “old man”, the old person, the way of life is based on the lusts of deceit. The “lusts” here refers to strong desires and in this context, negative desires: lusts of deceit. When our strong desires are not good, we open ourselves very readily to deception. So the evil one can tell us, “It is good; it is very good,” when in reality it is evil.

So then we need to be transformed from this whole way of life so that we will be renewed, we will put on the new man that is created in God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

What I want to highlight at this point of time now is to help us appreciate that unless we deal with the root of the problem then our experiences of God may not help us to stand in time of trials and difficulties to come. We are unstable and we can turn around to go our own way again. Experiences of God do not guarantee that we will continue in the right path. We have to continue to persevere and to be transformed, to be changed more and more into His likeness.

Let us turn to **2 Chronicles 16: 7-10**.

**2 Chronicles 16: 7-10**

- 7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.
- 8 "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand.
- 9 "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars."
- 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.

This is a very sad story but it brings to reality what often takes place in this world, and we need to take heed to this example. King Asa was described as a good king. He did many things right. He did love God, he did seek to follow Him and trust Him, and God caused him to prosper when he did so. The Ethiopians and the Lubim were an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen. And yet because King Asa relied on the Lord, God granted him a great victory.

But in this instance, instead of relying on God, King Asa relied on the King of Aram. He was depending on the arm of flesh, depending on human resources and power rather than depending on God. This was towards the end of his life.

So when the prophet rebuked him and brought a message from God, Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison. He put him in prison for transmitting the message of God to him. Instead of repenting, acknowledging his failure, seeking God for forgiveness, he was angry: for he was enraged at him for this. This shows that his heart was not yet properly developed. There was still much of the self-life within him: pride and arrogance.

And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time. When the heart is not properly transformed, then the outward form will show sooner or later. We may not show it immediately; it may take quite some time before the negative features surface. We may hide them for a long time but they will be seen some time or other. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks: we may pretend, we may say things that are positive but the spirit behind it is no longer positive, if our heart is no longer positive.

So King Asa had many experiences of God's working. God answered his prayers and yet he turned away from God. So the message is clearly stated in **verse 9**: "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

The central issue is: God is looking for such people, those whose heart is completely His. We are told that God looks throughout the earth for such people. It tells us this is the most precious to Him, this is the most important. He is not just looking for people who profess that they love Him.

He is looking for people whose heart is completely His and this is very important: it must be complete. If it is not complete, there will be many things that will compete. There will be many things that can compete with our love for God. Our love for God must be complete so that nothing can enter that will conflict with that.

We cannot love God and mammon. We cannot love God and anything that conflicts with the moral character of God. We must be clear about this. It is in this context that God will strongly support us.

What would he do to strongly support us?

The most wonderful thing, the most important thing is: He will strongly support us to bring about the transformation into the image of Christ from glory to glory.

That is the most precious aspect: whereby God would strongly support us in our striving to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do. He will enable us to do the things that He wants us to do. He will empower us; He will make provision; He will strongly support us.

So if we love Him and we are prepared to live fully for Him, we trust Him then we can experience that transformation to be what we ought to be and the power to do what we ought to do. The fullness of freedom can be ours.

So what does this mean in practical terms?

I want to bring to your attention to consider this seriously. It is something that we may not think about very much. We may think about it here and there from time to time, but I see this is something we need to constantly think about day in day out.

What are you living for? What are you pursuing? What is it that matters to you? What do you value? We need to keep constantly thinking about this. What are you seeking for? What do you want in life? What is precious to you? What are you prepared to give your life for?

This is the question that we must answer honestly, properly and with meaning and reality. If this is not properly dealt with then our lives may be lived in vain.

We need to consider how to be sensitive to God, how to seek Him to understand His ways and to want His ways with all our hearts – and that is all we want. We want to be like Him in His moral perfection, we want to fulfil His will in all faithfulness. Is that what we want?

As we go through life each day, we should ask ourselves: the things I am pursuing, the things I am doing, are they in line with what is meaningful to God or they do not bear any relationship with what He is concerned about?

Do we do the things because we like them? Do we do the things because people expect us? Do we do the things because of what others may say?

If we want to be transformed into the same image – the image of Christ – then we need to understand His ways. The Lord Jesus lived on the basis of the will of God. At all times, in every situation, even in the most difficult of times, He just wanted the will of God. If that is not the way we live our lives, then we cannot truly become like Him.

So this aspect I hope we will constantly ponder over in our lives; that the Lord may teach us, help us to be clear of the whole direction of our lives: what we want, what we desire, what we long for and what we are prepared to be committed to.

Then if that part is meaningfully responded to, we need to take the next step:

**Romans 12: 2**

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The apostle Paul says: "...do not be conformed to this world". Being conformed to this world is the way of the former manner of life: the life of the old man, conformed to this world, attracted by the things of the world.

He says: "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". If we have determined in our hearts that we want to live for God then we need to be transformed in our mind, in our thinking, because the old way of life was lived in the futility of our mind, darkened in our understanding. Now that must change; it must become a renewed mind.

But this renewal of the mind is not just intellectual understanding; it is not just being aware of spiritual principles. And that is why the apostle Paul says in the passage we read earlier: "...and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind". "...the spirit of our mind" must include and involve the whole direction of our lives, that is, what we said earlier: when our hearts are given to God.

So we must renew ourselves such that the whole way we think is based on this whole way of life. That means how we look at life, how we view situations, how we reason, how we consider courses of action are based upon our hearts being completely belonging to God. We want to honour Him, we want to serve Him, we want to do His will, we want to bring joy to His heart. Then how should we think, what should we do?

So we must be renewed in our mind in the context of our spirit being one with God in that whole direction, so that we may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We must have the mind of Christ; we must think the way God thinks in relation to the issues of life.



So how do we do that?

God has given us the Scriptures to help us understand His ways. So if we love God, we will love the Scriptures, we will want to know what God has to say; but not with our own natural thinking: it has to be guided by the Holy Spirit; it has to be taught by the Spirit of God who inspired the Scriptures. We have to seek God's guidance in order to understand what He has recorded.

And that is why God told Joshua to meditate day and night on the Law of Moses - that was the Scriptures he had at that time. So we are to meditate day and night in terms of the meaning, the direction, the values in God's kingdom: what God wants to accomplish, what is meaningful to Him, what is important to Him.

So we need to spend time to ponder over our values in life, our approaches, the way we do things, why we do things the way we do, what activities we are involved in, what we are actually seeking for in these various situations.

Many people in work situations spend many, many hours a day, many, many days a year, year after year thinking and thinking and plotting in order to achieve things that are of no ultimate value. But they may be necessary up to a point in fulfilling our responsibilities on earth. But it is so easy to be so absorbed in these things that they lose all proportion to true meaning in our lives.

We need to ponder over the things above day and night. That should be what occupies our hearts. We attend to the material things around us but our hearts should be concentrating on the things that truly matter for eternity.

So then how does it work out in our daily living in practical terms? If our heart is given fully to God, we renew our mind to understand correctly then what do we do after that? Well the apostle Paul put it this way:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

He says we are to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. And that is in the context of our having given our heart to God, of having been committed to the will of God, of learning to think the way that God thinks. In that context we are to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. This would mean that we consider carefully how we spend our time, how we use our resources, how we exercise what we can do in this body. All these are entrusted to us for us to make good use of in this world.

Bear in mind that this body is temporary. It is not meant to last forever, but it does serve a function.

While we are on earth, while we dwell in this body, how we live in this body can have great eternal significance.

We can be very preoccupied with what the body may like at the natural plane and so we can spend much time, money, energy pursuing the things of this world: whether the things we see, or the things we feel, or the things we eat, they can very readily occupy so much of our time and energy.

But we are to present our bodies to God so that they can fulfil the will of God in accordance with what He desires of us.

But then we may say, “Well, there are many things I cannot do in this body. I may feel very weak, I may not be so intelligent; I may not be so able in various things in this world. There are other people who can do these things but I cannot.” Well, the Scriptures give us no excuse:

**Romans 8: 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.

This means that whatever God wants you to accomplish, He will enable you to do so, if you love Him, if you trust Him.

“He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” So it is not by natural means alone. Yes, God does use natural means but it is ultimately spiritual: His Spirit dwells in you; His Spirit enables you; His Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies for the purpose of fulfilling the will of God – not for the purpose of doing what we like to do. We may still be very weak; we may still not be able to do many things in the physical realm, but if we are faithful to God, if we truly love Him, we will be able to fulfil all that He desires of us.

So that is why the apostle Paul says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” and that means he could do all things that God wanted him to do – not all things that God wanted Peter to do. What God wanted Peter to do might be quite different from what God wanted Paul to do. So God would enable Paul to do what He wanted him to do. Likewise with Peter: God would enable Peter, if he loved God, to do what He wanted Peter to do.

However there is a great hope that we have.

We can be transformed in our spirit to be like the Lord Jesus in His character and that would also involve the transformation of our mind in our thinking processes, in our understanding of things, not just at the intellectual level but in spiritual perception of things.

But ultimately God also wants to transform our body. This body is temporary and God wants to give us a new body, a transformed body.

**1 Corinthians 15: 50-54**

- 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
- 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,
- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
- 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.
- 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory."

The apostle Paul says: "...we will all be changed". All those who love the Lord Jesus, who belong to Him will be transformed to have a body that is different from the present.

This present body is described as a perishable body. The body we will have is described as an imperishable body. This body that we have is called "mortal body". The future body we will have is "immortal body". The mortal must put on immortality. God will give us a body that will last forever and that body will help us to express the meaning in our spirit.

When our heart completely belongs to the Lord, in the future we will have freedom to express that in this spiritual body. But how meaningful that will be will depend on how meaningfully transformed we have been in our spirit.

So we are to be transformed from glory to glory to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ in you, the hope of glory is what God has given to us. It is up to us how far we go, how much we develop, what we will become. And this applies not just for the time being but for all eternity.

Let us appreciate that all this that we are talking about, all this that we want to develop comes about through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 8: 2** tells us:

**Romans 8: 2**

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We are to be transformed to be like the Lord Jesus; it is by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we live according to the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to know a life that is set... free from the law of sin and of death.

This means we must learn to walk by the Spirit, we must learn to pray without ceasing, we must learn to be conscious of the will of God and the ways of God each day of our lives in the things that we go through. We need to constantly look to God, seek the guidance of the Spirit to understand what is meaningful in each situation that we go through.

So God wants us to be transformed from one person to another. We become a different person. We were selfish; we were self-centred; we walked in the flesh; we went our own way. Now, we are to be transformed to one who is self-giving, centred on God, loving the things of God, that which is good, and a positive influence on others, an asset in the kingdom of God.

We become a different person but in another sense we are still the same person because it is still the same spirit within us. We are making the choice, we are making the changes but it is God who transforms us as we look to Him. And so the apostle Paul describes it in this way very beautifully in terms of the transformation that ought to take place and which he experienced:

**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.

“I am what I am”: He is saying, “I am now what I am, which is different from what I was.” He was a persecutor of the church; he lived with confidence in the flesh. Now he no longer was like that. He was transformed, he was changed; he was now an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had given up the way of the flesh. He had sought to depend on God, to trust Him, to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was a changed man.

And how did it come about? By the grace of God: “...by the grace of God I am what I am...” The apostle Paul said he was the chief of sinners. He recognized something was seriously wrong with his life. But God had mercy on him. God reached out to him, God spoke to him, God revealed to him the path of life, and Paul responded with deep gratitude.

So it is also true for us. If we are to be transformed, we must learn to appreciate the grace of God. If we do not appreciate the grace of God, we are not going to be transformed. We are going to labour by our own selfish power and energy and pride. We will not be transformed. It is as we learn to appreciate it is God’s grace helping us, leading us, teaching us, that we can be changed, that we will benefit.

So the apostle Paul is very clear about this and he says, "...by the grace of God I am what I am..." but he did not stop there. He said, "...and His grace toward me did not prove vain..." God did not bestow His grace on Paul in vain, which may often happen in many lives. It is in vain because we have not responded well, we have not benefited from that grace.

He says: "...but I labored even more than all of them". He laboured very hard. Here he is not primarily referring to labouring in the sense of doing things. He laboured very hard to understand the ways of God, to identify with Him, to give his life for that which really counted, to care for people as he ought to; he laboured very hard to be transformed. That is why he said, "The sufferings of this present time, these are afflictions but they cannot be compared with the glory that is to be revealed." The outer man may decay but the inner man will be renewed day by day if we pursue what is right. Paul laboured very hard because he had come to appreciate the meaningfulness, the value and the potential of all that he could be because of the grace of God.

So he said he laboured very hard, "...yet not I, but the grace of God with me". It was not just the grace of God transforming him; God by His power just transforming Paul. It was not like that. "...the grace of God with me - I worked very hard but it was by the power of God, by the grace of God. He worked in me, I worked with Him." So this is the way that we are to develop our lives: We must work very hard but not by ourselves. We must work very hard, depending on the power of God.

So in summary we can say this transformation takes place by choice, by faith, by the grace of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This transformation takes place by choice because God gave us this choice. It is up to us whether we will or will not become like Him. He will not compel us; He cannot compel us because our character has to be the result of our own choice, our own moral choice. So it has to be by choice.

It has to be by faith because if we do not exercise faith in God, there is no life in us; there is no understanding; there is darkness; there is ignorance. It is not possible for us to be transformed. It has to be by faith, trusting God, listening to His instructions, trusting Him to enable us.

It has to be by the grace of God. We already went our own way, we deserved His judgment. God reached out to us not just to forgive us but to help us to become what we ought to be.

And it is by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. That is why the baptism with the Holy Spirit can help us greatly as we experience His presence, but this must become part of our being.

We partake of the divine nature and into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a goal. We are not just seeking to develop and develop, but not knowing where we are going. We are to develop to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul told the Galatians, he said that he was in labour again for them "until Christ is formed in you".

This is the work of the Holy Spirit as He brings about the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, which will manifest the glory of God.

So we need to bear in mind we are created moral beings.



We are created so we have to depend on God, we have to trust Him; we have to work within His framework. But we are moral beings, which means: He has given us independent moral choice to decide what we want to become, and God will hold us fully responsible for that choice: for the way you choose to live your life, what you become.

So today basically, we have sought to appreciate the importance of being transformed into the likeness of Christ and we can look forward to this in increasing measure to develop from glory to glory, for all eternity. It is a difficult path but it is a wonderful path. It is lived by faith, on the basis of the grace of the God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us understand what all this should mean for our lives personally. Let us not just think in general terms in terms of just principles or other people, but let us think of ourselves: What does it mean to us personally? Is there something that God wants to say to you personally that you need to respond to? If so, it is a good time to respond to Him if you are conscious that this is meaningful and right.