

Abiding In Christ

Lesson 5

Spiritual Transformation

Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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Lesson 5

Spiritual Transformation

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Introduction

God gave us the gift of his Spirit to be with us forever, and to make us more like Christ in our thoughts and desires throughout our lifetime. Yet only about 25% of adult Christians in the United States believe in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Christians who believe in the Holy Spirit include Evangelical Christians and about 15% of Mainstream Christians. The Barna and Pew Research Centers defines adult Christians in the United States into three groups; Evangelical, Mainstream, and Nominal Christians, by their response to two questions.

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
2. Do you believe in the Bible as the accurate word of God?

Evangelical Christians from all denominations answer yes to both questions and comprise 10% of adult Christians in America. Mainstream Christians make up 40% of adult Christians and believe Christ is their Savior but have varying views regarding the Bible's accuracy, and its statements about Satan, hell, the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus, salvation by grace not by works, the importance of faith in everyday life, and sin – primarily regarding homosexuality and sex outside of marriage.

The most surprising group is Nominal Christians, comprising 50% of US adult Christians who answer no to both questions, they do not believe in Christ as the Savior or in the Bible as the word of God. Nearly one quarter of Nominal Christians do not believe in God as the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe. They do not believe their faith should be a guiding force in their daily lives or values.

Against this backdrop of diverse religious thinking among US adult Christians is a general disbelief in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Is it any wonder that the largest growing religious segment in the United States is "Unaffiliated" or "None" when most Americans do not believe in the Spirit of God who desires to radically transform their lives?

Discussion

1. The primary work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to transform our minds to be Christ like and our lives so that we desire righteousness, loving God and others with all heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37-39 paraphrase). The Holy Spirit seems to have at least three ways of working in people's hearts. For some, a sin is taken away never to return; for example, a drug addict comes to Christ and is never plagued by the desire for drugs again. Others are baptized at a young age, mature in Christian families, and are spared the affliction of addiction and other life-threatening temptations. For others, like the disciple Paul, a "thorn in the flesh" remains despite the most

earnest and pleading prayers. For those who continue to struggle with the same sin, their struggle with sin or addiction becomes like the Israelites walk in the wilderness when Moses told them, "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands" (Deuteronomy 8:2). How has the Holy Spirit worked at renewing your heart?

- a. Complete transformation and freedom from a sin?
- b. Lifelong faith and guidance
- c. Gradual, daily struggle and testing?

Personal discussion. Answers vary.

2. A dilemma Christians have is sinning after we receive Christ. We receive our salvation in Christ joyfully, assured our salvation is by God's grace and mercy through faith in Christ. Our faith is the free gift of God, not by our own good works, righteousness, or any merit in ourselves. Salvation is God's gift. But what about sanctification? We sin; so, we try harder, pray more, make promises to God and ourselves – we try to earn our sanctification. This was the pitfall of the Galatian church, so Paul gave them this warning:

^{Gal 3:3} Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

^{Gal 3:4} Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing?

^{Gal 3:5} Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

- a. If sanctification is not about human effort, then how are sanctified? See also Romans 8:26-27

Romans 8:26 – ^{Ro 8:26} In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

^{Ro 8:27} And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

No human effort produces the fruit of the Spirit. The only power that will keep us victorious comes through the Holy Spirit. Just as there is no salvation without Christ, there is no Christian living without the Holy Spirit.

- a. **The Holy Spirit's power is our greatest need**
- b. **His power and blessing is freely promised to all of God's people**
- c. **The promise can only be received through faith, earnest prayer, and waiting on God for his blessing to come**

3. The work of the holy Spirit in the life of believers is to transform our minds but we are not passive by-standers. In fact, we are in the fight of our lives, and God provides weapons of divine power for us to use against sin (2 Corinthians 10:4). Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God to resist sin and the devil. Paul's reference to the "full armor" means the complete armor, we are lacking nothing. Refer to the following scriptures and discuss how each of God's weapons is used to fight sin in our lives

2Co 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Eph 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Eph 6:14 Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place,

Eph 6:15 and with your feet fitted with the **readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**.

Eph 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Eph 6:17 Take the **helmet of salvation** and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**.

Eph 6:18 And **pray in the Spirit on all occasions** with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

- a. How does each of the divine weapons protect us? Discuss a time when you have experienced their protection.
 1. Truth

Truth heals misunderstandings and protects us from the slander of others by ultimately exposing their lies.

When I was working on an oil and gas deal in the former Soviet Union, my leadership team decided we could not meet with a potential partner because of concerns that their oilfield leases were not obtained legally. I called our in-country company, asked them to cancel our meeting with the petroleum ministers, and left the office for home at the close of the day. At 6:00AM I received a call from the in-country office and was told the meeting could not be cancelled because the petroleum ministers had already changed their plans to attend the meeting, and cancelling the meeting would jeopardize future negotiations in the country. I needed to rush to the airport to attend the meeting abroad. On the airplane, I wrote a note to the leadership team explaining what happened and that I would be meeting with the ministers but not the potential partner whose leases were in doubt and sent the note when I landed. The leadership team was furious. They did not share all the information with other team members, and said that I went to meeting for frequent flier miles. When I returned, I found myself facing a review board over my conduct. I told the truth, produced the letter sent to the leadership team, and was cleared of any wrong doing. I was congratulated for acting in the best interest of the company. The truth was my defense.

Sin thrives in secrecy and is hidden through lies. Lies are difficult sustain in marriage (or in any relationship) and the truth of the sin is ultimately exposed, resulting in loss of respect for the spouse and harming the marriage.

2. Righteousness

Our righteousness begins and ends in Christ, he is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). If we look to ourselves for righteousness, we will be disappointed, filled with failure and guilt. The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to be Christlike and to recognize temptations as testing to build maturity so when temptations arise – we make like Joseph and run (Genesis 39:12)!

We should not doubt our righteousness before God when we sin, because Christ is our righteousness. We grieve over our sin and repent. Though we might commit the same sin many times, we should not despair, it is the Holy Spirit causing us to grieve over sin, and he is at work in us, transforming us into the person God intends for us to be.

3. Readiness

We need to be on the ready to recognize the situations that tempt us so that we flee from the sins that confront us. We know our weaknesses and know we will sin if we allow our minds to dwell on the things that tempt us. Paul encouraged the Philippians to guard their minds by thinking about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

4. Faith

Christians can become depressed and doubt their faith in their struggle with sin. Our mind can be filled with doubt and Satan's lies – "You are not good enough, you can't be forgiven for what you've done, the Holy Spirit is not in you because you keep repeating the same old sin, God has forsaken you in your suffering." In these low times we need to remember the foundations of our faith:

**God loved us before he created the world and made good plans for us.
God has called to us to himself, and given us the gift of faith in Christ
Christ saved us from the consequences of our sin
Christ is our righteousness
God sealed us with his Holy Spirit forever.**

5. Salvation

We are saved and forgiven - a thousand times forgiven. This is an unshakable truth we have in Christ. Salvation comes through faith in Christ, not through obedience and good works. Obedience and good works come through salvation.

6. Sword of the Spirit – the word of God

When Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan's lies, Jesus answered the Satan with scriptural truths, setting the example for all Christians. What are your favorite verses from the Bible that help you withstand temptations? Several favorites are:

1Co 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Jude 1:24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—

Jude 1:25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

2Co 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

2Co 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

2Co 12:9 But he said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

The verse I find most encouraging these days is that God is testing my heart (to make me more like Christ):

Dt 8:2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

I think what I find encouraging about this verse is that temptations become tests to strengthen me. Moses spoke these words to a generation raised in the wilderness of trial, and they would boldly enter the Promised Land, strengthened in their faith, and shaped by God’s hand.

7. Pray in the Spirit –

Jesus’ disciples saw the intimate relationship he had with God the Father and they wanted the same, so they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus taught them to pray a simple prayer,

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13)

I find that I need to pray this prayer many times through day – Father, lead me not into temptation, I know that I am weak and will not withstand the temptation, deliver me from evil.

Gifts

4. The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to us to shape our character and to bring unity and peace to his children, his chosen people. Consider the qualities the Holy Spirit brings to us in the following verses:

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **Gal 5:23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Gal 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Col 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Col 3:14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

- a. What stands out to you in these verses?

All the qualities the Holy Spirit brings are wonderful, good, and desirable. I want all of them in increasing measure in my life!

- b. How does Christ's crucifixion free us from sin and give us assurance we are no longer controlled by a sinful nature?

The scriptures teach that our sinful nature is dead! We are joined with Christ in his crucifixion when we are baptized and believe in him as our Savior. We are joined with him in his crucifixion to put to death our sinful desires and joined with him in his resurrection so that we could be created anew, free from sin, and led by his Spirit. Sometimes we seem to still be captive to our sinful desires but that does not change the promise and the assurance we are still united with Christ.

- c. What is the basis of Christian forgiveness?

We forgive others because we have been forgiven. We did not merit forgiveness, so we should not demand that the other person merits forgiveness either.

- d. We are easily sidetracked and lose sight of our calling as God's people. What helps you stay focused on the spiritual qualities the holy Spirit brings to your life?

The things that keep me most grounded are prayer, readiness, and desiring to be more like Christ. I view temptations as a test to help shape my character and make better choices to avoid them.

Closing Thoughts

One of my favorite Christian authors is Jim Cymbala, Pastor of the nondenominational Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. In his many books on power of the Holy Spirit, Pastor Cymbala writes about how many of his parishioners are former junkies, prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, lawyers and business types whose lives hit rock bottom, only to be born anew into Christ and to have their lives radically transformed by the Holy Spirit. My story is not their story, but I have known addiction to sin as well as experiencing God's grace, and his comforting and transforming presence through the Holy Spirit. As I close out the final chapters in my life, I want to be totally yielded to God, I want to be full of the Holy Spirit in a way God intended.

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1Jn 2:17).

Closing Prayer, Francis Ridley Havergal (Verses 1, 5, and 6)

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.