

## **What Can You Expect?** **Part I—Sharing the Spirit of God**

***“For this cause I bow my knees to the Father . . . that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may take up His dwelling in your hearts through faith, since you have your roots and foundation in love”*** (Ephesians 3:14-17) (Author’s translation).

We have had much to say about what cannot be guaranteed in our relationship to Christ. We have talked a good deal about things that may not be altered in one’s personality, even though one has become a Christian. We have looked at those circumstances in our lives on the earth that may not be resolved—as, for example, the thorn in the flesh that Paul spoke of. Sometimes things change and sometimes they don’t. The failure to receive healing, for example, may have nothing to do with one’s own inadequacy, but rather with God’s ultimate purposes (as with Job). We have spoken very frankly about these things in order to deal with the disappointments that often accompany one’s faith. There are too many guarantees made in some religious circles, by those who make promises for Christianity, that the Bible itself does not support. Often such claims are based upon inaccurate translations or unsound applications of texts or fragments of texts. There is an old saying (and it’s a good one)—“A text out of context is a pretext.”

For example, there is a text that is often quoted in connection with changes that are supposed to take place in the lives of the believer—*“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (II Corinthians 5:17). In context, the apostle has just said that we no longer know anything after the flesh—not even Christ. In that context, our whole orientation is no longer flesh, but spirit. When we have been born again, we are in a totally different realm—the kingdom of God. In that sense everything is new, because it is seen from a totally different perspective. The text does not mean that if we have become Christians, everything in our lives, including our personalities will automatically change. There are a great many of the old fleshly habits and patterns that remain the same, even as with Paul, himself. The impression is often left, however, by some leaders in the church, that if one is not totally changed, one has not received the Holy Spirit. This has caused a great many believers no end of distress—even to withdrawing from Christ and from fellowship. Discouragement is one of Satan’s most effective tools and he uses even Christian leaders to promote this, by their constant badgering of the saints. In many circles, one is never good enough or never does enough to satisfy the demands of the church.

**But what can one expect from Christ** then, in the way of changes and benefits? Of course the most important thing is the presence of the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell within. **We share God’s Spirit.** This is what makes all things “new.” That is to say, our essential nature is changed. Whereas believers wear the flesh like a cloak during our sojourn on the earth, our inner nature becomes spirit. Paul was very specific about the continuing struggle with the flesh. To the Philippians he wrote of his lack of

confidence in the flesh and rejected his entire religious heritage as well as his religious exercises as being produced by the flesh. What replaced that religious factor in him was the “righteousness of Christ as produced by the Spirit of Christ within him. *“Not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ—the righteousness of God by faith.”* And yet, in spite of his rejection of the flesh factor, he admitted that he still struggled with it, as he indicated in Romans 7. *“The good that I would I do not; the evil [unsoundness] that I would not I do.”*

So the presence of the Holy Spirit in us changes our inner nature, but does not necessarily change the flesh. *“In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing”* (The attempt on the part of some to assume that Paul’s experience in Romans 7 was replaced in Romans 8, is a pure speculation that has no support in either chapter). Deliverance from this “body of death” comes by Christ, but as indicated by Paul’s continuing struggle with the flesh, that deliverance is not now complete. However, while one may succumb to the flesh from time to time, one is not ultimately defeated by it.

So then what does the Holy Spirit do for us now while we are on the earth? Assuming that our nature is changed so that we will be able to spend eternity with God, what about now? He changes our entire perspective toward God; toward ourselves; toward others; toward the world; toward Satan and evil. As a result of the Holy Spirit within, we have an inner caring about Christ that prevails continuously in spite of the moods and attitudes of the flesh. We may have our doubts and disappointments and discouragements, but always there is the inner desire to stay with Christ. We have a different attitude toward ourselves—seeing ourselves as having intrinsic worth as human beings for whom Christ died, however worthless we may think we are in terms of our fleshly nature. And we have a certain caring about others, in spite of the negative thoughts we may have and human conflicts with others. We often pray for others and reach out to them from our spirits, even though we may not always like them in the flesh. (The Greek word *agape* means simply caring and does not include liking.) The spirit within us, sees humans on the earth as created in the image of God, and ascribes to them a worth that the natural flesh does not. Further, through the eyes of the Holy Spirit we see Satan and evil and sin as real forces in the world and do not dismiss them as mere fabrications of the human psyche. And the world is itself seen as the transient habitation of our temporary “earthly tabernacle” as Paul calls it, or the “mortal coil” as Shakespeare has it. And even though we are admittedly attached to the “old house” and do enjoy its multitude of fascinations, there is always the reservation deep within our spirits—the “open trench” sign as it were. We know that we must be cautious on its treacherous footing. Such an attitude of caution, however obscure it may be in the lives of many, nevertheless is an irrepressible sense deep within us that life is much more than these earthly toys and baubles or this “cosmic sandbox.”

These are the things that the Holy Spirit does within us. They are not always outwardly observable, but they are, nevertheless, a constant flow within us, like the artesian spring below the rugged surface of the earth. The test of this is the patch of green that springs up along the water course—the moment

of caring; the reaching for Christ; the clinging to hope in spite of all; the persistent returning again and again, often in desperation, to the refuge of prayer. None of these things are grand religious expressions. One may never feel noble about one's faith. The flesh is not allowed to bask in the artificial sunlamp of fleshly fervor. But the reality is there. The reality of the true sunlight of the "Sun of Righteousness," often obscured by clouds, but ceaselessly there.

One may be disappointed in the personality changes of oneself or others; one may be frustrated by circumstances; one may have one's vacillating feelings and one's fleshly failings and one's ceaseless inadequacy, but always there is the persistent sense that we belong to Christ, and the ceaseless whisper deep within our spirits—*"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."*

**What can you expect?** You can expect that in your human helplessness and fleshly inadequacy, the Holy Spirit will come to dwell in your heart if you ask Him—not because of anything you do or can do. It is not feelings of faith fabricated by the human mind; it is not vows or promises or fervor; it is the very faith of Christ Himself, beamed from the Spirit of God into our spirits, that gives within us the eternal flame of the Divine presence.

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*Next month "Part II - Strengthened by His Might"*  
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