

No Limits to the Spirit's Work, The Holy Spirit at Work in the Believer

Week 6

Warm-up question: What did you dream of becoming as a kid?

Alternate Warm-up: Who was your favorite superhero as a kid?

What is a Christian? A simple question I know, but if I went around the room there would likely be many different answers, usually focused on particular things that a Christian does, but my question is more about the Christian himself; how is a Christian different from an unbeliever? You may have grown up in a church environment in which you had little knowledge of the scriptures and no real understanding about the person of Christ and His claims of eternal life. If that is the case, you may have been disillusioned with what you perceived as religion, thinking that you had tried that, been there, and it did not hold any relevance for you or do you any good. I have listened to many such people recount their religious experiences as cold, shallow and not making any positive difference in their life. I know when I hear a story like that; they could not have met my Savior and Lord, Jesus! It is possible to become "inoculated" to true biblical Christianity by receiving a "shot of religion." The religious inoculation keeps us from getting the real thing! When we grow up in a religious environment that is devoid of knowledge about what God has done for us through the death and resurrection of Christ, we do not get the true picture. We do not understand about the New Birth and baptism into the Body of Christ. We are like versions of Clark Kent with Kryptonite wrapped around our minds so that we cannot begin to understand the power that is available to us. Every Christian has awesome power at their disposal but for many of us, our minds have been restrained from seeing our own potential in Christ. This is a very common tactic of the enemy and one he has always used to keep God's people from knowing and walking in the power of their identity in Christ. When we do not understand the authority we have as God's own children, we abdicate that power and settle for lives that are far less than what we could be experiencing. We are like the land owner in Texas during the Great

Depression who went through years of poverty only to find out that great oilfields were under his feet. Great wealth and resources were on his land and he did not know it, all he had to do was go deep. One of the things I am very aware of as a pastor is that I come across many people whom I feel could be used a great deal more by God than they are being used. Unused potential is very common in America. It would be wonderful to get some normal everyday Christians like many of us, to a different country where God is on the move. I would like to see many of you launched into needy situations where you can't depend on yourselves but God who wants to be your only resource. What amazing stories you would have! A pastor in a town 30 miles from me had been encouraged to invite me to speak at his evening service. When I arrived on his doorstep a couple of hours before the meeting, he was visibly shocked by how young and small I was. He said "but you are so young!" I replied, "I am trying to get old, but it takes time." Don't be put off and think that God cannot use you because of your youth or because of a lack of experience. Walking with God happens when we take one step at a time and He can use whoever He chooses. David, Jeremiah and Timothy were all young when God began using them. We tend to believe that God only uses the wise and knowledgeable but it is not true. God wants His power to flow through us whatever our age or background. It's not about us, what we know and how much wisdom we have acquired, in fact, God loves to use those who are just babies in their new faith.

¹¹ I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet **he who is least** in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:11 Emphasis mine.)

What do you think Jesus means by the words, "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven?"

My viewpoint on this verse is that John the Baptist, although a great man of God, did not have the Spirit in the same way that Christians do today since the Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit was not given

until Jesus was glorified:

³⁹ “...By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:39).

¹⁶ “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and **will be in you**” (John 14:16-17, Emphasis mine).

He who is least in the kingdom of heaven I believe to be one that has just stepped into a relationship with Christ. One that knows very little about who they are and who they belong to, yet living inside of them is the Spirit of the Living God, the creator of the Universe! He who is least in the kingdom of God has awesome potential but does not yet know what he or she can do with that potential.

When a man or woman gives their lives to Christ, they are entering into a marriage commitment with God, what’s called a covenant or a solemn contract. This covenant made in the blood of Christ binds God to be his or her God and the Christian vows to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and strength. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth that he had promised God that he would work hard to present them to their husband, Christ, as a pure virgin with sincere and pure devotion (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). We are called by God into a marriage union with Christ. Paul elaborates further on this thought in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he talks about the oneness of Christ with His church:

³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

A Christian is one who has been brought into a spiritual union with Christ, what’s known as being born again (John 3:3). Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers by saying, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?”.....”He who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:15-17). The Spirit of the living God lives within you! You are not just a Christian! You are sons and daughters of the living God, bought and paid for by

the precious blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. You are called by God into a marriage union with God Himself. A marriage between a man and a woman is just a picture of what God has done in you by your becoming a Christian. Bible Study is just catching up with your conversion!

²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness — ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of **this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1:25-27 Emphasis mine).

Who would be the saints that Paul is writing to in this passage? What is the mystery that is revealed to them?

Paul’s usage of the word *saints* is not just about the super spiritual ones that we read about in books who have been “canonized” as saints, but here he was speaking to the main body of the church, to all who called themselves Christians at that time. That would include you and me if you would identify yourself as a Christian. According to Paul’s use of the word here, you are a *saint* if you are a believer. We get the word saint from the same root as the word *sanctified* or set apart. If you are a believer in Christ you have been set apart for holy use, sanctified in Christ. That’s why Paul in some of his letters addresses them to the saints in Ephesus (1:1), or Philippians (1:1), or Rome (1:7). The saints were not dead heroes of the faith, but people who were very much alive, otherwise why would Paul be writing to them? Many of you are much further on than being the least in the kingdom of God. Open your eyes up to the awesome potential that is in you! The God of the universe has chosen and predestined each of us that believe even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:11) came into being. When you believed you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit, a down payment, guaranteeing what will be ours in the future (Ephesians 1:4-5; 13-14). What you do with that potential and power is up to each of you to determine, according to your faith. God honors faith, faith that sees beyond one’s own capabilities and looks to the power of the Spirit that is resident within us.

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and

revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also **that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened** in order **that you may know the hope to which he has called you**, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power **for us who believe**. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:17-23, Emphasis mine).

Why does Paul keep praying that believers (he's writing to the church) would have the eyes of their heart opened or enlightened? What does he mean by the phrase "the eyes of your heart?"

There are some things that God reveals to us by the Spirit that seem so impossible to our physical logical brain. Faith and trust in God are conceived in the realm of the imagination or heart (not the organ that pumps blood, but the inner spiritual man that sees things spiritually). Logic says 'no way!' but a heart that is alive to God and growing in faith has a 'yes' that agrees with God that: "all things are possible to him who believes" (Matthew 19:26).

Paul writes to the church at Corinth telling them that satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), satan also seeks to influence the church that we might not see all that God has done for us through the cross. Our spiritual eyes need to be opened to the incomparably great power for "**us who believe**" (Ephesians 1:19). God wants to use every one of us in different ways if we will step out and trust him. With the relationship that we have of oneness with Christ, the authority and power that has been given to Him has also been given to us as His representatives. We represent him! No matter how young or how old we are in Christ.

For 21 years Mrs. Chang had lain in bed at her home in China, unable to move her arms and legs. Finally, the pain got to be too much, and she asked her eldest son to take her to the hospital, 40 miles away. The doctors there discovered that some of her organs were

almost dead, so they advised her son, "Take her home so she can die with your family." But before she left, a Christian nurse came by her bed and slipped her a copy of the Gospel of Mark. "Read this when you get home," she whispered. When Mrs. Chang got home, about the first thing she did was to ask her son to read something from the booklet. Opening it to page one, he began: "this is the good news of Jesus Christ...." Before he could read any further, Mrs. Chang's bones started to move. Within moments, she sat up, completely healed! She promptly gave her life to the Lord. The next day, on her way to the village well to draw water, she was asked by everyone, "say, aren't you Mrs. Chang? What doctor healed you? We want to use him too!" Mrs. Chang invited all the women to her simple home. When a large group had assembled, she stood and began speaking: "This is the good news of Jesus Christ...." In only four weeks, all 600 people of the village decided to follow Jesus! From there the story gets even more interesting: When the report got around, a police force arrived to stamp out this "new sect." They beat the villagers, shot their animals, burned their crops, and left, thinking that would be the last they would ever hear about this Jesus Christ. They were oh, so wrong: the 600 converts remained steadfast, and within four years, 70,000 turned to Christ throughout the whole region. Who was the star of this story? The faithful nurse. She was not a famous evangelist; she was a 'nobody' that was responding to a need with love in her heart. ¹

We live in a day when God wants to use ordinary people like you and me, if only we will believe and not put any limits on what God can or can't do. Roger Bannister, the runner, completed something that seemed impossible at one time. He ran a mile in less than four minutes. Other runners thought that it was impossible for a man to run that fast. Once it was proved by Bannister that it could be done, guess what happened, the next year 37 other runners broke the four minute mile! The following year three hundred others also ran the mile under four minutes. What happened? The measurement of time did not change. The only thing that changed was that other runners believed that what was possible could be accomplished. We are the ones who put limits on what God can do in us and through us. Our biggest problem to living a life in step with the Spirit and moving in His power is ourselves:

"Can God spread a table in the desert?" "Can He sup-

¹ Mega Shift, by James Rutz, Published by Empowerment Press, Page 5.

ply meat for His people?” “They turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:19, 20, 41; King James Version, emphasis mine).

Dictionary.com defines the word ‘limit’ as: the final, utmost, or furthest boundary or point as to extent, amount, continuance, procedure, etc.: *the limit of his experience; the limit of vision.*

Have you ever set limitations on yourself that you are aware of? Have you ever felt that you wanted to do something, or felt that God had a task for you but you did not take action because of feelings of inadequacy?

²⁸ When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they replied. ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, “**According to your faith will it be done to you**”; ³⁰ and their sight was restored (Matthew 9:28-30).

In the passage above, Jesus asked the blind men first as to whether there was a limit or boundary in their minds, “Do you believe that I am able to do this? We can be stuck in our minds because we look at ourselves and our own inadequacies and we refuse to believe that God can use us. There are three things that severely limit us:

1) Our view of God. If we believe that God no longer moves by His Spirit in power today, we limit Him to work through us. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He is still doing healings and miracles today; He just chooses to use His body, the church, you and me, to do the signs and wonders. God is the great “I AM WHO I AM!” (Exodus 3:14). He is able to be to you everything you need. He is the Master of the Universe, Creator and Sustainer of all things. Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14).

2) Our view of others. We compare ourselves to others. Unknowingly we put barriers on what we can do by saying that we are not like this person or that person.

3) Our view of ourselves. When we look at ourselves we are often reminded of words spoken over us in the past. “You will never amount to anything!” “Why can’t you do anything right!” Parents, teachers or influential leaders sometimes foolishly speak words over us that can become self fulfilling prophecies, invisible barriers that limit us from trusting God to powerfully work in us and

through us.

What negative words come to mind that have been spoken over you?

If such words have been spoken over you like that, then ask your Small Group leader and group to pray for you. You could pray something like this: Father, I ask you now to come and break the power of negative words that have been spoken over me. I reject and resist the power behind those words to limit me in living the Christian life to its fullest. Amen!

God Himself puts no barriers before us. This is what the Lord Jesus said those who believe in Him could do:

¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

This saying is hard for the logical mind to hold on to. How can we do greater things than Jesus? Perhaps it means that being part of the body of Christ, more people will be used and more works will be done. I don’t know about you, but I want for those around me to know the power of God and “fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Corinthians 14:25).

Everything we seek to do has to come out of relationship with Christ and be led and prompted by the Spirit of God. We cannot just go and do anything we want without the Lord’s direction. I would love to go and empty every hospital but any work of God happens out of relationship to Him. I can do nothing that is fruitful in ministry without His direction and prompting. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5). Even Jesus Himself could do nothing apart from being directed by God:

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19).

Turn to and read Mark 16:15-20:

¹⁵ He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach

the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” ¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it (Mark 16:15-20).

In the passage above Jesus describes believers and disciples as doing various kinds of supernatural works. What's the difference between the two do you think? Would you classify yourself as either of these? What are they given authority and power to do?

Prayer: Father, I pray that you would open the spiritual eyes of each of us to see all that you can do in us and through us. Take away every limit that we have ever placed on ourselves being used of you. Amen!

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