Holy Spirit – Dependence is a good thing

Why do this series in the first place?
- Often neglected – rarely understood
- A Fuse core value – dependence on the spirit
- We have so much to learn about God – the HS is the answer, but let’s get back to basics

Brief Review
- HS promised throughout Scripture
- Organism vs Organization
  - Each have a gift
  - Each called to serve

What is wrong with “spiritual”
- Modern conjuring
- What’s new with you - sanctification

What does dependence look like?
- Biblically “walk in the Spirit” – towards “Christlikeness”
- It is lifelong – “teleios” – means “point in time, but continued growth/action needed”
- How do we get there?
  - Word study – 2Ti 3:15-17
  - Not grieving Him – sinful actions, sinful language, sinful attitudes, quenching Him
  - Be Spirit-filled – Ep 5:17-18
  - Steps: 1) confess sin (1Jn 1:9) 2) surrender to God (Ro 12:1-2) 3) focus on Jesus (Co 3:16-17) 4) obedience to the Word (read it, learn it, follow it… Ep 5, Co 3) 5) live by faith, follow the Spirit (He 11:6, Ga 5:16, 2Co 5:7)
- Obedience = growth
- Meant to happen in the family of believers – not solo, but group growth (like gym membership)
- We are to be fruitful – Jesus said so (Lk 6:43-44), Paul said so (Ga 5:22-23)
- Network opportunity – the book for $5
- Get a leader to walk through it with you!

Discussion Questions – Small Groups
- What does it mean to you to “walk in the Spirit?”
- In what ways do you feel that you are who God created you to be?
- Where are the areas that you feel you could grow the most?
  - Work together to come up with Scripture verses that would help each person with these
- What is an instance or story when you felt like you were walking in the Spirit?
- Which fruit of the Spirit do you feel needs to develop the most in you?
Getting to Know the Divine Helper: The Spirit’s Role in Sanctification

During the 1970s our family took a tour through a sawmill next to Payette Lake in McCall, Idaho. We saw how the logs entered the mill from Payette Lake, were processed in the mill, and finally became various sizes of lumber. What impressed me most about the sawmill was the steam engine which powered it. Every function of the sawmill depended on power from that steam engine. No steam engine—no power—no operation of the sawmill. In a similar way Christians are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit’s power for the operation of sanctification in their lives.

Every Christian has the Holy Spirit and spiritual power through Him (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22). “Spirit-powered” is the right motto for Christians, yet the motto is practically meaningless unless we understand and use the Spirit’s power to sanctify us.

Some Christians sense their need for the Spirit’s power but then live as if He did not exist. Someone has suggested that Christians function about 90 percent of the time with no concern about the Holy Spirit. If this figure is correct, then many Christians are definitely not experiencing the Spirit’s available power in their sanctification and service.

The problem of powerless Christians is not caused by the divine Spirit. The Spirit is all-powerful and perfectly willing to help us. But if we expect to tap His power, we must understand His role in our lives and then we must respond properly to Him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A DIVINE PERSON

Recognize That the Spirit Is a Divine Person

“I believe in the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit.” This statement represents the belief of orthodox Christians throughout church history. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit shares the same divine essence as the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; John 14:16–17; Acts 5:3–4). The deity and personality of the Spirit require that we reject all concepts of the Spirit that consider Him less than full deity or only an impersonal “it” or “force.”

Relate to the Spirit as a Divine Person

Since the Spirit is a divine person who lives in each Christian, our relationship to Him should be personal, reverent, obedient, and intimate.

Jesus Christ emphasized that the Spirit is a divine person and that believers can have an intimate relationship with Him (John 14:16–17; 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–8, 13–15). Christ taught that the world does not know the Spirit, but He told His disciples, “You know Him because He abides with you and will be in you” (14:17). In this verse the Greek word translated “you know” (ginōskete) generally goes beyond factual knowledge (which the world can have about the Spirit) to include experiential knowledge.

A personal, intimate knowledge of the Spirit begins with a personal, saving knowledge of Christ. When a person trusts Christ, he or she immediately becomes God’s spiritual child, and God becomes that person’s heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus says, in essence, to a new believer, “I want you to meet your spiritual Father in heaven and to recognize that the Holy Spirit now dwells in you.”

Since the disciples already knew Christ as God’s Son and their Savior, they also knew the Father and the Spirit. Christ promised the disciples further teaching to help them develop a closer relationship with the Father and the Spirit as well as with Him (14:23; 16:12–15).

Believers can experience “the fellowship [koinōnia] of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14) which means “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.” Thus believers should avoid the kind of impersonal, mechanical relationship to the Spirit that some illustrations imply. Two gears smoothly meshing instead of clashing together illustrates a proper “relationship,” but two gears cannot respond to each other in voluntary, intelligent, effective, and creative communication as two persons can. Individuals and their relationships change in ways not possible with inanimate objects. Think of the many interpersonal dimensions in marriage and the potential for growth or for deterioration in a married couple’s relationship. We relate to the Spirit as a divine person and not as an inanimate object or an abstract concept.

God the Spirit is unchangeable in His divine being and attributes, but this does not mean His relationship to believers is rigid or mechanical. Rather, God intends that believers have a dynamic and personal relationship to the
Spirit (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 5:16). The interface between believers and the Spirit can be even more intimate and multidimensional than any relationship involving only human persons. Of course, the imperfection and consequent room for growth in the relationship between us and the Spirit is totally on our side. As our relationship to the Spirit grows, so our Christian life grows.

Respond to the Spirit in Balance with Response to the Father and the Son

The persons of the triune Godhead exist and work together in perfect harmony, and Scripture teaches that Christians can have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:3). Therefore growth in our relationship to one person of the Trinity enhances our relationship to the other two.

Scripture also teaches that each person of the Godhead has distinct roles. For instance, in prayer we recognize the Father as the main Addressee of our prayers (Matt. 6:9; 18:19), the Son as the Mediator of our prayers (Eph. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:5), and the Spirit as the Helper in our prayers (Rom. 8:26–27). So the general formula for prayer in the New Testament is to the Father, through the Son (or in the name of the Son), and in the Spirit.

Respond to the Spirit and to Your Feelings within Biblical Boundaries

Our response to the Spirit and our expectations of His activity should function within biblical boundaries. Otherwise we will get out of step with the Spirit and hinder our relationship to Him and His purpose for us.

Within biblical parameters Christians can properly relate their human experiences and feelings to the Spirit’s person and work. For instance, Christians experience the Spirit’s ministry as He “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). Christians can feel grief about their sin, just as the Spirit feels grief about their sin (Eph. 4:30).

Without a biblical framework human experience can be misinterpreted and lead to false doctrine. Human feelings can mislead Christians, especially when Christians confuse their feelings with the Spirit’s leading. Four guidelines can help us relate our experiences and feelings to the Spirit and His ministries.

- **Beware of judging your relationship to the Spirit by your physical, emotional, or even “spiritual” feelings.** Christians may feel an awesome exhilaration either in solitude or in a huge crowd of other Christians. Such feelings, however, do not necessarily mean one is in close communion with the Spirit. We can mistake good feelings in pleasant circumstances for divine approval of our spiritual condition. Christians can appear carefree, happy, and very expressive to God and others and yet have a wrong relationship to the Spirit through some hidden sin.

- **Recognize that your feelings can change almost instantly while your relationship to the Spirit may remain the same.** Over the telephone someone tells you your father just died. Or you receive news that one of your children has been in an accident and is in a life-threatening condition. I have personally experienced both situations. Did my sudden change of emotions because of these announcements mean that my spiritual condition went from good to bad or from bad to good because my feelings went from joy to sorrow and from carefree to deep concern? Trying to see reality only through one’s momentary feelings is like looking through a kaleidoscope and rotating it before each view. Each view is different and so one’s feelings may change in short intervals. But underneath our variable feelings we can respond biblically to the Spirit and develop a deep, intimate, stable relationship with Him. So remember to judge your spiritual condition by God’s unchanging Word and not by your changeable feelings.

- **Cultivate your spiritual and emotional health by acknowledging your true feelings completely to yourself and God and selectively to appropriate humans.** A few months before my father died, he reminded me, “Henry, you can share anything with me.” He meant it; and I cherished that privilege. Thankfully, I have that same open communication with my wife, Shirley. We all need a family member or friend with whom we can share openly and confidentially.

More importantly, we can share everything with our heavenly Father, with Jesus our Savior, and with the Holy Spirit, our divine Helper. People operate under pressure the same way containers do. Even the strongest containers will burst under enough pressure, so they need relief valves for safety. For your spiritual, mental, emotional, social, and physical welfare, use your relief valve—share honestly and totally with God, as Asaph the psalmist did (Ps. 73). Holding in all your feelings neglects God’s provision for your relief and can endanger yourself and others.
• Recognize that biblical response to the Spirit can produce a sense of spiritual well-being despite unpleasant emotional, relational, and physical feelings (2 Cor. 6:10). Christians in a right relationship to the Spirit experience God’s love and presence, inner peace and joy, and other fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

• Let Scripture control your thinking, feelings, and relationship to the Spirit. Then you can exercise freedom of experience and expression within biblical boundaries and avoid an “anything goes” approach that can lead to doctrinal aberration and bizarre behavior.

THE HOLY SPIRIT SANCtifies CHRISTIANS

The Spirit is the Christian’s divine “Helper” (paraklētos; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). We need to know how the Spirit sanctifies us so that we can cooperate with Him and fully benefit from His sanctifying work.

The Spirit Sanctifies Christians through a Lifelong Process

Sanctification is a lifetime spiritual journey that requires human effort and God’s empowerment. We may have crises and dramatic turning points in our spiritual pilgrimage that can accelerate our sanctification. Yet there is no experience in this life that can make Christians perfect so that they no longer need progress in sanctification. Perfect Christlike maturity always lies before us as the goal of sanctification. Paul recognized this truth in his own experience: “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).

Progress in sanctification requires steadfastness and a fixed focus on the goal just as a lengthy footrace does. Therefore “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus” (Heb. 12:1–2).

New Christians should grow rapidly toward spiritual maturity rather than lagging in spiritual infancy for several years as did the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 3:1–3) and also the Christians addressed in Hebrews (5:12–14). Even Christians who reach spiritual maturity soon can always progress more in sanctification and reach higher levels of Christlike maturity (Phil. 3:12–14).

Instead of believing that sanctification is a lifelong process or that spiritual maturity requires “time” (Heb. 5:12) and “practice” (5:14), some Christians try shortcuts to spiritual maturity; current thinking promotes a quick-fix approach. Modern advertising has trained people to want everything their way and immediately. Virtues of self-control and patience to delay gratification in order to achieve a higher purpose or a greater value are hardly considered options in present thought. Quick-fix methods to attain spiritual maturity are ineffective and inevitably disappointing. Dallas Willard correctly observes, “But the one lesson we learn from all available sources is that there is no quick fix for the human condition. The approach to wholeness is for humankind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our own powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience. But we don’t like to hear this. We are somewhat misled by the reports of experiences by many great spiritual leaders, and we assign their greatness to these great moments they were given, neglecting the years of slow progress they endured before them.”

Instant methods to attain Christlike maturity will surely fail us just as crash diets may bring quick weight loss but fail to achieve permanent results. Conscientious dieters need to follow a proper plan of eating and exercise that can help achieve lasting weight loss and good health. And Christians need to follow the biblical plan of empowerment from the Spirit, spiritual nourishment from the Word, and practice of biblical disciplines to attain Christlike maturity (Heb. 5:12–6:1).

Christians have tried many shortcuts to achieve instant spiritual maturity, but we will examine only two.

First, some Christian speakers and writers give the impression that through an unconditional surrender to God, Christians will immediately reach a high level of spirituality, love, peace, joy, and Christian victory with reduced spiritual conflict. Scripture does command us to present ourselves to God so that we will progress in sanctification and realize His will (Rom. 6:13, 16; 19; 8:6; 12:1). Though decisive dedication to God prepares us for greater spiritual growth, it cannot bring instant spiritual maturity or relieve our conflict with sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil in this earthly life.

Commitment to God is like a foundation for a building. The foundation of a building is indispensable, but the rest of the building will not go up instantly. Laying a solid foundation is prerequisite to the long, arduous task of erecting the building’s superstructure. Christians should first lay the foundation of dedication to God and then build on their dedication a superstructure of spiritual growth (Phil. 3:12–14).

Second, some Christians expect to grow quickly through an alleged “secret” to spirituality. Some believe the secret to spirituality is for earthly Christians to experience total sanctification and eradication of all their sin, but
such teaching is unbiblical and deceptive. As John wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

What if the alleged spiritual secret is biblically neutral because it is neither supported nor condemned by Scripture? For example, some Christians find journaling very helpful. We may recommend journaling to others, not as a biblical command, but as a practical means that may help promote spiritual growth. Christians who write a daily spiritual journal but neglect the Spirit, the Word, and other means of sanctification will greatly limit their spiritual growth.

If a supposed secret to spirituality is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture, then it is not a secret. During most periods in church history certain biblical teachings were neglected while others were overemphasized. Teachings neglected for a time would seem like well-kept secrets when they became prominent again. This was certainly the case when the Reformers began to articulate justification by faith. And certain doctrines about Christian living such as the spiritual disciplines may suffer neglect and then receive their appropriate place in current Christian teaching. But neglected doctrines are not really secrets if they are truly biblical, for God has already revealed them in His Word.

Whenever we encounter an alleged secret of sanctification, we should first determine if it is biblical. If it is taught in Scripture, then it is not really a secret. If it is not taught in Scripture, then it cannot be the key to spiritual living since Jesus indicated that the main means of sanctification are revealed in God’s truthful Word. “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Individuals, groups, churches, or movements that teach and practice unbiblical methods of sanctification mislead and victimize others in the worst way—in their spiritual life. Wrong ways to sanctification produce only disappointment, hypocrisy, and spiritual retardation in Christian living instead of Christlike maturity.

Christians can avoid becoming victims of spiritual fraud by focusing on biblical methods of sanctification and by using biblical truth to evaluate all teaching about sanctification or any other alleged Christian teaching (John 17:17). Then we can discern God’s truth from false teaching and maximize spiritual growth.

*The Spirit Sanctifies Christians toward Christlike Maturity*

God has purposed to conform every Christian to His Son’s image (Rom. 8:29), and the Spirit is sanctifying Christians toward that goal. Paul elaborated on this process: “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” (2 Cor. 3:18). Scripture is the primary means to reveal “the glory of the Lord” to Christians, and the Spirit is transforming Christians “into the same image [that is, the Lord’s image] from glory to glory.” The New International Version translates the expression “from glory to glory” as “ever-increasing glory.” Here “glory” is the radiant manifestation of Christ’s perfect character most fully revealed in the New Testament.

God’s sanctification process reminds me of Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Mount Rushmore was just another granite cliff. But Gutzon Borglum, the designer and supervisor of this memorial, could envision within this chosen granite cliff the facial sculptures of four United States presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. These potential sculptures visualized by Borglum became actual through his and his son’s work.

Likewise, God envisions the potential of each believer to bear His Son’s image (Rom. 8:29). And God is actualizing His vision by sculpting us into Christ’s likeness through His Spirit. Mount Rushmore furnished the material for these presidents’ sculptures, but believers do more than furnish the material for their transformation through sanctification; God requires believers to participate in the process (Phil. 2:12–13).

Examine your participation in your sanctification with this question: Am I learning more of Christ from Scripture, applying more Scripture to my life, and depending more on the Spirit to make me more like Christ? When you can consistently answer yes to these questions, you are experiencing the essence of sanctification because you are becoming what God envisioned you to be—Christlike.

*The Spirit Sanctifies Christians Primarily through God’s Word*

God’s Spirit is the personal change-agent in sanctification, and God’s Word is His instrumental change-agent. “The sword of the Spirit...is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Normally the Spirit uses Scripture and not a mystical experience to sanctify Christians. The Spirit produced Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21), and He teaches therein that scriptural truth is essential for spiritual growth (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 1 Pet. 2:2). Knowing that the Spirit sanctifies us through the Word does not automatically sanctify us. The Spirit sanctifies us as we learn and apply the Word by His help.
Proper response to both the Spirit and the Word is crucial for spiritual growth and for balance in Christian living. God never intends that we choose between the Spirit and Scripture anymore than we would choose which hand to clap with. In each case we need both. When you give the Spirit and the Word proper place in your spiritual life, you help protect yourself from one of Satan’s main tactics in spiritual warfare—imbalanced Christianity. Physical and spiritual falls both happen most easily when people are off balance.

Christians need Scripture to reveal God’s will and the Spirit to help them understand and do God’s will (Eph. 5:17–18; Col. 3:16–17). Knowing and doing God’s will according to Scripture puts us on the right path to pursue sanctification (Ps. 119:133; Heb. 12:14). Otherwise our personal senses and the whims of other people control us so that we become confused about the right path to take and the right decisions to make in Christian living. Jeremiah recognized the inability of humans to guide their own lives when he said, “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). God’s Word is our map (Ps. 119:105), and God’s Spirit is our Guide (Rom. 8:14) to keep us following Christ instead of floundering in the Christian life.

Scripture provides objective criteria to help us evaluate our experiences, feelings, thoughts, and intentions in relation to the Spirit’s ministries and private promptings (Phil. 4:8). When our experiences, feelings, thoughts, or intentions are contrary to Scripture, then we know that they are not from the Spirit, but when they fall within the boundaries of Scripture, then they could be the Spirit’s means to prompt and lead us in God’s will. Christians should not conclude that all their feelings and impressions are Spirit-produced. But each Christian should seek to discern through a combination of Scripture, prayer, wise counsel, peace of heart, and sensitivity to the Lord when personal impressions and promptings are from the Spirit.

Professed experiences “in the Spirit” without biblical and rational control can lead to confusion, uncontrolled emotionalism, and even fanaticism both in the local church and in individual Christians. Someone may claim, “I glowed ‘in the Spirit’ like a bright light during an evening of solitude in the desert.” If no witnesses were present when this event allegedly happened, then it is difficult to prove that it did or did not occur. Even if it did occur, this does not prove that it was right according to God’s prescribed will. An experience may be real but not right. Adam and Eve’s original transgression was very real to them—maybe the most poignant event in their lifetime—but it definitely was not right.

Certain Christians make animal-like noises in the presence of others and claim that their practice is “in the Spirit.” However, the Spirit-produced Word encourages ministry that edifies other Christians and not just oneself (1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 17). Making animal-like noises is not prescribed in the Word of God, and it is difficult to see how this practice edifies others and promotes peace and orderliness (14:1–40). Christians may mean well when they claim to have spectacular “in-the-Spirit” experiences such as glowing in the dark or making noises like animals. However, such experiences and practices can divert us from a Christ-centered, Scripture-based, and Spirit-filled Christian life. If we seek to understand and do God’s will revealed in His Word, God’s Spirit will surely empower us to perform God’s prescribed will.

What if Scripture is emphasized without the Spirit? Then we may conform to the letter of Scripture in a cold, perfunctory way that paralyzes our spirituality. This approach characterized the legalistic Pharisaism of Jesus’ time. He denounced this empty form of religion and pronounced judgment on its practitioners (Matt. 23:13–36). Christians who neglect the Spirit may end up living like the hypocritical, legalistic Pharisees (see Gal. 3:1–5).

Our Lord aimed several criticisms at Pharisaic legalists: They emphasized minor biblical details and neglected major biblical commandments (Matt. 23:23); they sometimes displaced biblical truth with human tradition (Mark 7:1–13, esp. v. 13); and they were guilty of hypocrisy (Matt. 23:13–15, 23, 25, 27–29). We must avoid Pharisaic legalism which emphasizes (a) the letter of the law without the life of the Spirit, (b) the head and its factual knowledge without the heart and its personal relationships, and (c) outward conduct without inner character. Such an approach leaves no practical place for the Spirit’s work in the inner person. Christians who give proper place to both the Spirit and Scripture find that He gives them spiritual reality, liberty, and vitality (Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:17) in place of hypocrisy, legalism, and lifeless religion.

Christians can agree that they need the Spirit’s power for their spiritual life to function just as they need an engine for their car to function. But often knowledge about the Spirit and His power is substituted for appropriation of the Spirit and His power. This subtle substitution may account for the moral failure of many Christians through scandalous sin. So Paul’s warning is always timely for all Christians, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). The more intensely we pursue sanctification by obeying God’s Word and relying on God’s Spirit the less liable we are to fall into sin.
Knowing how to respond to different people can be difficult. If we face a tax audit, we want to respond properly to the tax auditor’s questions. If we have a job interview, we hope our responses will favorably impress the interviewer. And if we do not personally know the tax auditor or the interviewer and the exact questions they may ask, then knowing how to respond to them may be difficult.

Right response to the Spirit is much more important than right response to tax auditors and job interviewers (though good preparation and prayer for God’s help in these human relations is certainly appropriate). And if responding properly to other humans can be difficult, then you would expect that proper response to God’s Spirit is much more difficult if not impossible. Thankfully, just the opposite is true. Believers can know the Spirit personally (John 14:17), though He is an infinite, divine person. Furthermore, believers can know from Scripture exactly how they should respond to the Spirit. The Spirit is unchangeable in His being and characteristics. So the right response to Him never changes, whereas the right response to other humans often does change with the situation. Christians can and must respond properly to the Spirit to have a right relationship to Him and to promote their sanctification.

In our response to the Spirit we should follow four biblical commands. Two are negative—“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30) and “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19), and two are positive—“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 4:18) and by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16).

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Any sin grieves the Holy Spirit because sin opposes the Spirit’s perfect holiness. The context surrounding Ephesians 4:30 reveals some specific sins that grieve the Spirit.

Sinful Actions Grieve the Spirit

Stealing is an example of sinful actions that grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:28, see Ex. 20:15). Christians may think of stealing only as robbing a bank, embezzling money from an organization, or breaking into a house and taking valuable property. But stealing can be as subtle as giving your employer fewer hours of work than you agreed to perform for certain wages. A skilled worker at a manufacturing company was asked, “How many people work at your place of employment?” He replied, “About half of them.” And the other half, composed of slackers, included some Christians.

A Christian organization allowed some of its employees to have a private code number for personal use of a copier at a reasonable cost per copy. But the practice had to be stopped because some of these Christians would not pay for their copies. That is stealing, and it grieves the Spirit, even if those employees thought the organization somehow owed them the copies without charge.

When Paul reminded Christians not to steal, he added a positive practice. “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need” (Eph. 4:28). In addition to refraining from stealing, Christians should earn their living by legitimate labor and then go the extra mile by sharing with those in need (Acts 18:3; 2 Thess. 3:7–12).

Sinful Language Grieves the Spirit

“Let no unwholesome [literally, ‘rotten’] word proceed from your mouth” because foul and destructive speech pains the Spirit (4:29). “Slander” is an example of sinful speech (4:31). Anyone who maligns another aligns with the devil, whose name means “the slanderer” (1 Pet. 5:8; see Rev. 12:10). Scripture regards slander as verbal cannibalism because it damages and can destroy the reputation of others. “But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:15). Yet many people still believe this saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” This quote is a half-truth because the first part is true, but the second part is plainly false. Wrong words do hurt, and they stick in victims like barbed hooks. Verbal abuse is often the most serious hurt that people inflict and suffer, and we know it by experience, observation, or both.

To avoid grieving the Spirit and hurting other humans, we must practice tongue-control. No one can tame the tongue through mere human power. But Christians can yield to the Spirit and gain tongue-control through His
power. And Christians who gain control of their tongue show that they have progressed in sanctification to become a “perfect” (Greek, *teleios*, “mature”) Christian (James 3:2).

Christians may gain control of their tongues but not necessarily of their thoughts. Christians with an uncontrolled thought life are still immature. Admittedly people do not speak everything they think, and wisely so. We can hide our thoughts from people more easily than we can hide our speech. Still, the contents of the heart and the communication of the mouth are closely connected. As Jesus said, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt. 12:34). People often have wrong thoughts that they never plan to reveal. Then in an unguarded moment they impulsively push the “play” button of their mouth and the hidden tape in their heart begins to roll. The mouth does eventually expose the hidden things of the heart. In order to control our mouth and its words, we must let the Spirit control the source of our words, our heart. Only then do we avoid thoughts and talk that grieve the Spirit.

Christians should stop grieving the Spirit with sinful speech. They should also replace destructive words that harm others with constructive words that communicate God’s grace so that they edify other believers and evangelize unbelievers (Col. 4:5–6).

**Sinful Attitudes Grieve the Spirit**

Christians grieve the Spirit through sinful attitudes as well as through sinful actions and words. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). In contrast to these sinful attitudes which generally lead to sinful words and actions, God commands Christians to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other” (4:32). Our first step is to stop grieving the Spirit with our sin, but then we need to take a second step and replace our sinful attitudes with right attitudes.

When Christians do not grieve the Holy Spirit with their sins, the Spirit can fill them and produce His fruit in and through them. Then we have the Christlike character and power to be kind and tenderhearted toward others and to forgive them when they hurt us with wrong attitudes, words, and actions.

If Christians have buried feelings of bitterness and anger, these feelings will keep springing up despite attempts to keep them suppressed. Denial of these destructive feelings only intensifies and prolongs their harm, and they can keep the stomach agitated and the head aching. Christians need to deal with an unforgiving spirit saturated with anger and bitterness, though they may believe that their sinful feelings are justified. These sinful feelings are like an anchor dragging behind a boat that cause one’s spiritual growth to slow, stop, or even go downward. Feelings of bitterness and anger and an unforgiving attitude severely grieve the Spirit and hinder His sanctifying work within us.

If you have these negative emotions, you can find release from them by taking these steps: (a) confess to God that you have these sinful feelings and by faith claim God’s forgiveness (1 John 1:9); (b) forgive anyone who has sinned against you (Eph. 4:32); (c) confront your victimizers in love and share with them your concerns; and (d) replace your sinful attitudes with right attitudes (4:32). Christians who take these steps lay a firm foundation for emotional health and spiritual vigor. Otherwise, a Christian’s public life may look fine, but in his or her private life sin is seething and the Spirit is grieved.

How do we know when we have grieved the Spirit?

Disobedience to God’s Word is the surest signal that we have grieved the Spirit. Since Scripture originates from the Spirit and expresses His perfect will, anything contrary to Scripture is contrary to the Spirit. The Spirit is pleased when we obey Scripture and pained when we disobey it.

Also our feelings may indicate that we have grieved the Spirit. To interpret correctly our physical, emotional, and relational feelings can be difficult. We already discussed the danger of gauging and guiding our spiritual life by feelings and without biblical input. Christians should evaluate their lives within a biblical framework but also carefully consider their feelings.

Just as people can usually detect through their feelings a wrong relationship with another human, so Christians generally sense through their feelings when they have a wrong relationship with the Spirit. When we have a lingering and deep conviction that we have grieved the Spirit and find confirmation in Scripture, then our feelings have pointed us in the right direction. We can find help in understanding how the Spirit relates to our feelings by reading chapter 8, “The Spirit and Our Emotions,” in Charles Swindoll’s book, *Flying Closer to the Flame*.

A believer’s emotional sensitivity when he or she grieves the Spirit can be even greater than in human relations because Christians can have a much more intimate relationship to the Spirit than to any human. And strained, bad, or broken relationships are usually the major source of grief for individuals. So Christians probably know better than they wish to admit when they grieve the Spirit. Our sin hurts the Spirit and us too.

You can stop grieving and hindering the Spirit by practicing four principles: (a) Recognize that your disobedience hurts and hinders the Spirit. (b) Confess and forsake all sin. (c) Claim God’s promise of forgiveness.
and cleansing so that the Spirit can freely change you and work through you. (d) Obey Scripture through the Spirit’s power to prevent sin. By following these four principles you allow the Spirit freedom to fill and sanctify you.

DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT

Christians are commanded, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). What does it mean to quench the Spirit? Some teach that quenching the Spirit is a wrong response to the Spirit’s ministry within oneself. However, the next verse, “Do not despise prophetic utterances” (5:20), infers that quenching the Spirit means hindering the Spirit’s manifestation through others rather than through oneself.

Lang says the command is Paul’s “warning against a deliberate suppression of the extraordinary operations of the Spirit in the congregation.” Hogg and Vine also note, “the figure latent in the verb [‘quench’] here is that of Matt. 3:11, Acts 2.3, and...the meaning seems to be ‘do not prevent or obstruct the manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s power in others.’ ” For instance, if a Christian exercises the gift of exhortation within biblical guidelines (Rom. 12:8), we quench the Spirit if we try to squelch this Christian’s exhortation.

When we quench the Spirit’s ministry through other Christians, we grieve the Spirit within us and hinder their ministry to us. Ministry to one another helps Christians grow. Therefore when interpersonal ministry in the body is hindered, the whole body is hindered in its corporate growth toward Christlikeness. Instead of quenching the Spirit, permit and receive the Spirit’s ministry through other Christians to you and to other members of Christ’s body (1 Thess. 5:19).

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

God expects all Christians to be filled with the Spirit. Paul wrote, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). The Greek verb for “be filled” (plērousthe) indicates that the Spirit does the filling and that believers should be Spirit-filled continually. Four practical questions need to be considered about the Spirit-filled life.

What Does It Mean to Be Spirit-Filled?

Two main lines of evidence support the conclusion that to be Spirit-filled means to be Spirit-controlled.

First, when we examine representative contexts in which the Greek verbs for “fill” and the Greek adjective for “full” occur in relation to the Spirit and to other things, we find that whatever fills people takes control of their attitudes and actions. For example, people filled with the Spirit bless, praise, and thank the Lord, boldly proclaim the Word of the Lord, give to others, and experience joy (Luke 1:67; Acts 4:31–35; 13:52). But people “filled with rage” at Jesus tried to destroy Him (Luke 4:28–29; 6:11), and the religious leaders “filled with jealousy,” imprisoned the apostles (Acts 5:17–18).

Second, the comparison between “drunk with wine” and “filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18 indicates that the Spirit controls a Spirit-filled Christian just as wine controls a wine-filled person. However, the results of being Spirit-controlled are in contrast to the results of being wine-controlled. Spirit-controlled Christians live according to the will of God in their character, choices, communication, and conduct. Wine-controlled persons live contrary to the will of God and according to their flesh in their character, choices, communication, and conduct.

Why Do Christians Need to Be Spirit-Filled?

Christians need to be Spirit-filled because God commands it. Christians are not commanded to be regenerated by the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, or sealed by the Spirit because all these ministries of the Spirit occur once for all at the time of salvation. But believers may be filled with the Spirit repeatedly, and they may lack the Spirit’s filling and thereby grieve the Spirit through their disobedience.

Sometimes Christians view God’s command to be Spirit-filled as an option rather than an obligation. They may feel unworthy to be Spirit-filled and believe that the Spirit-filled life is reserved for an elite class of Christians. Yet God requires all Christians to be Spirit-filled, and Christians who are not Spirit-filled disobey God’s command and miss the spiritual blessings of a Spirit-filled life.

“Be filled with the Spirit” is just as much a divine command as “Do not get drunk with wine.” Suppose an evangelical church member were found drunk in a congregational meeting of his church. The other church members would expect the church leaders to take biblical steps to deal with this Christian’s drunkenness (Gal. 6:1) because Scripture prohibits drunkenness (Rom. 13:13; Eph. 5:18). We would hold the drunken Christian accountable for
flagrantly disobeying Scripture. But do we hold Christians accountable for not being Spirit-filled? Probably not. This is inconsistent practice, and it will continue until the church body and individual Christians take seriously God’s command regarding the filling of the Spirit.

**Christians need to be Spirit-filled to know and do God’s will** (Eph. 5:17–18). The filling of the Spirit in every New Testament occurrence “signifies the empowering presence of the Spirit of God, enabling the individual to accomplish the will of God.” God’s will for believers includes and emphasizes their sanctification. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). The Spirit-filled life that fulfills God’s will and pursues sanctification is not for “super” Christians only; it is the kind of life God expects from each Christian (Heb. 12:14).

**How Can Christians Be Spirit-Filled?**

Christians can be Spirit-filled by meeting five basic requirements. These are not complex, mysterious, austere, and burdensome stipulations. Rather they are basic Christian practices that are interrelated, included in Christian obedience, and intended to bring spiritual liberty and blessing. Also, meeting these requirements is not just “following a formula” or “complying with regulations.” Instead these requirements are ways by which we can rightly relate to the Holy Spirit. Practice these requirements, and you will enjoy them and their result—the Spirit-filled life.

- **First,** to be Spirit-filled, Christians must confess and forsake their sins (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9). All sin counters the Holy Spirit’s perfect purity and hinders His ministry through Christians. The Spirit’s desire to fill and use our human lives shows His great condescension, and His desire to fill and use clean lives shows our need for confession and cleansing of all our sin (see Ps. 139:23–24).

  The Spirit is the divine Sanctifier, and the close connection between sanctification and cleansing from sin is taught in 2 Corinthians 7:1. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Cleansing ourselves from sin (Ps. 119:9, 11), helps us conform to the Spirit’s character and experience His control. And Spirit-controlled Christians always advance in sanctification.

- **Second,** to be Spirit-filled, Christians must present (yield or offer) themselves to God (Rom. 6:13, 16; 12:1). Paul commanded believers, “Put yourselves at God’s disposal” (6:13). When you do this, the Spirit takes control, works God’s will through you, and sanctifies you (1 Thess. 4:3).

  We grieve the Spirit when we hold back anything from God because “the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful” (James 4:5, NLT). Anything we withhold from God, we leave at the disposal of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Satan is not timid about stepping in and taking control of unyielded areas of our lives. Therefore yield all to God so that you “do not give the devil an opportunity” (Eph. 4:27).

- **Third,** to be Spirit-filled, Christians must maintain a life focused on Christ (Col. 3:16–17). The Spirit’s ministry is focused on Christ, for the Spirit testifies of Him (John 15:26–27), teaches about Him (16:12–15), glorifies Him (16:14), and transforms believers into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore to align with the person and purpose of the Spirit, we must focus on Christ and obey Christ. Scripture calls us to keep our lives Christ-centered instead of self-centered (5:14–15). When we are Christ-centered, our lives are Spirit-filled.

- **Fourth,** to be Spirit-filled, believers must be obedient to God’s Word. A comparison of Ephesians 5:18–20 and Colossians 3:16–17 shows that being Spirit-filled and obeying Scripture are closely connected. Both passages begin with a command: “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), and “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Col. 3:16). Obedience to each command yields the same results—a ministry of singing, praise, and thanksgiving to one another and to God (Eph. 5:19–20; Col. 3:16–17).

  The place we give the Word in our lives measures our willingness to let the Spirit fill us. We can expect the Spirit to fill us when we let Christ’s Word richly indwell us. And the more we are Spirit-filled, the more we can receive, understand, and obey Christ’s Word. The Spirit and the Word work together as supportive partners, so we need to let them both fill our lives.

- **Fifth,** to be Spirit-filled, Christians must live by faith. Believing God is as essential to Christian living as breathing oxygen is to physical living. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6). “And whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).
Christians have been saved by faith (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8–9), and they should go on living by faith (Col. 2:6). As Paul wrote, “The righteous man shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17), and “I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).

Faith is more than a requirement to be Spirit-filled. Faith is the principle that underlies the four previous requirements and activates them. By faith we confess and forsake our sins; by faith we present ourselves to God; by faith we keep our lives Christ-centered; and by faith we obey God’s Word. Once we meet the requirements for being Spirit-filled, we are to believe that God will fill us with His Spirit.

A Christian can memorize these five requirements and still miss the Spirit-filled life. Does this mean the formula failed? No, the requirements are biblically based, and if any Christian meets the requirements, he or she will be Spirit-filled. But knowledge without action is like a dead battery; it accomplishes nothing. If you truly hunger and thirst for the Spirit-filled life (Matt. 5:6; John 7:37–39), you will learn and do the requirements, and the Spirit will fill you. The spiritually hungry heart says, “I love God and want to obey His command to be Spirit-filled. I want what God wants for me at any cost.”

Some may think these requirements for the Spirit-filled life are like mechanical and legalistic steps that stifle the spiritual life. This is a legitimate concern, but these requirements are dynamic and liberating biblical truths and not legalistic or burdensome (John 8:31–32; 1 John 5:3).

Should Christians pray to be Spirit-filled? General practice of prayer is certainly included in the requirement to obey the Word in order to be Spirit-filled. Still, Christians can also pray specifically for the Spirit’s filling according to these purposes: (a) to express genuine desire to be Spirit-filled, (b) to ask for God’s help to meet the requirements to be Spirit-filled, and (c) to express trust that you will be Spirit-filled as you meet the requirements through God’s power. This kind of prayer for the Spirit’s filling is biblical so long as it comes from an obedient life and conforms to God’s will. Also, if Christians are indifferent about being Spirit-filled, they can pray appropriately that God will change their indifferent attitude into a spiritual passion for a Spirit-filled life.

Here is a fitting prayer for the Spirit’s filling:

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your holiness, love, and sovereign plan. I want to worship you in spirit and in truth and to do your will. I praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who died for me, saved me, and gave me a holy position in Himself. I am grateful for your indwelling Spirit and His purpose and power to make me holy because You are holy. I confess my sins of _______ [name your specific sins here] and claim your promise to forgive me and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Lord, I desire to be a Spirit-filled Christian. Help me to meet the requirements for the Spirit’s filling so that I will obey you, become more like your Son, serve your people, and witness for You. Lord, I believe that You will fill me with your Spirit as I obey You. Glorify Yourself through me, O Lord! I pray in Jesus Christ’s name Amen.

What Are the Main Results of Being Spirit-Filled?

The Spirit-filled Christians can expect these wonderful results.

- Spirit-filled believers manifest Christlike character (Gal. 5:22–23).
- Spirit-filled believers overcome sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil (Gal. 5:16–18; Eph. 6:10–18).
- Spirit-filled believers can pray “in the Spirit” and according to God’s will (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20).
- Spirit-filled believers can fulfill their biblical responsibilities in their personal, interpersonal, marital, family, and vocational relationships (Eph. 5:18–6:9).
- Spirit-filled believers have power for bold and effective evangelism (Acts 4:31).

Some of the results of the Spirit-filled life overlap the requirements of the Spirit-filled life. For instance, a major requirement for the Spirit-filled life is obedience to God’s Word (John 14:21; Col. 3:16–17), yet we listed obedience to biblical responsibilities in human relationships as a major result of the Spirit’s filling (Eph. 5:18; cf. 5:21–6:9). If some requirements to be Spirit-filled are virtually the same as the results, how can we first get the results to meet the requirements? It is like asking how to get an egg without a hen.

This question can be answered by viewing the Spirit-filled life in three stages: (a) When Christians initiate obedience to meet the requirements for the Spirit’s filling, God empowers them to obey. (b) Consequently they become Spirit-filled and produce the results of the Spirit-filled life. (c) Then through the results of the Spirit’s filling they can express more obedience and become more Spirit-filled. This cycle repeats itself as long as Christians increasingly obey the requirements for the Spirit’s filling. So each stage in the cycle of the Spirit-filled life enhances the other stages. In other words, the Spirit-filled life produces sanctification, and sanctification promotes the Spirit-
filled life. These results should motivate us to give high priority to the Spirit-filled life because the Spirit’s filling is “the source of sanctification as well as all spiritual fruitfulness.”

WALK BY THE SPIRIT

God commands Christians to “walk by the Spirit,” and if you obey this command, “you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Walking is used in both the Old and New Testaments to represent a person’s way of life, manner of conduct, or lifestyle (Gen. 17:1; Ps. 1:1; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 1:7). Walking by the Spirit means that we function under the Spirit’s control in every activity legitimate for Christians. So we must “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) before we can “walk by the Spirit.”

A Spirit-controlled Christian is comparable to an airplane on the runway that is pilot-controlled, empowered, and ready for takeoff. The airplane taking off and flying under the pilot’s control depicts a Christian functioning under the Spirit’s control or walking by the Spirit. If our life is Spirit-filled, we can walk by the Spirit, and then all our choices, communication, and conduct can be controlled by Him.

Our responsibility to walk by the Spirit correlates with the principle that Christians “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Walking by faith means we continually and consciously rely on God and His provision for all our needs. Walking by the Spirit means we continually and consciously rely on the Spirit’s control to prevent sin and to progress in Christlikeness. Thus walking by faith and walking by the Spirit are two essential principles in the Christian life that enhance each other.

How much the Spirit controls and changes your life depends on how much you respond to these commands. Christians serious about sanctification will obey these commands immediately and consistently.

8
Aiming for Christlikeness: God’s Goal for Sanctification

YOU CAN BE LIKE Abraham Lincoln. He overcame all obstacles and became president of the U.S.” With these words we encourage young people to imitate “Honest Abe.” Older people are reminded that they still can be creative and productive like Grandma Moses, who took up painting when she was seventy-six years old and became an acclaimed artist. Almost everyone from toddlers to senior citizens looks for role models to follow.

Christians also look for role models, but who should their role models be? The only perfect model for Christians is Jesus Christ, and God’s goal for Christians is conformity to Christ’s perfect humanity. A believer can imitate other believers but only insofar as they are Christlike (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6–7). Christians commit idolatry when they give godlike status and worship to mere humans or to angels (1 John 5:21; Rev. 22:8–9). But Christians can rightly worship and imitate Christ because He is fully God and also perfect man (Matt. 14:33; John 5:23; Heb. 1:6).

Even unbelievers can show traits that the Lord commends to His people (Luke 16:8). Jesus recognized the wisdom of people who count the cost before they commit themselves to a building project or to warfare, and He taught that likewise people should count the cost before they commit themselves to follow Him as disciples (9:28–33).

This chapter emphasizes that Christlikeness is God’s goal for Christians and that sanctification is His way for believers to become more like Christ.

SCRIPTURE SHOWS THAT CHRISTLIKENESS IS THE GOAL OF SANCTIFICATION

“Hitch your wagon to a star,” “Aim for the top,” “Be the best you can be.” These mottoes urge us to pursue lofty ambition. But is ambition right or wrong for Christians? Ambition is wrong when our goal is self-exaltation, since God warns us not to seek great things for ourselves (Jer. 45:5; Matt. 23:12). But ambition is right when our goal is to become like Christ for God’s glory. Four key biblical points support this goal for sanctification.
First, God has predestined His people to “become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29), and God is accomplishing this goal in His people through sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18).

Second, the Spirit transforms Christians into Christ’s image, and this transformation is the essence of sanctification.

Third, Paul aimed to “present every man complete [Greek, teleion, ‘full-grown’ or ‘mature’] in Christ” (Col. 1:28). He intensely desired to see Christ’s character developed and displayed in each believer. Paul expressed this passion in Galatians 4:19, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” Christlike maturity then is the goal of spiritual development.

Fourth, the objective of the church, the corporate body of believers, is Christlikeness according to Ephesians 4:13: “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In this context “a mature man” does not refer to individual believers but to the maturity of the body of Christ. The reference in verse 12 to “the building up of the body of Christ” supports this interpretation. However, “we” is used distributively of individual believers in verse 15, “we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ.” The biblical concept of the body of Christ assumes that the body consists of individual members and that the body grows more Christlike only as the individual members grow more Christlike through ministry to each other (4:12). According to 4:13–15, “Christ then is the Source of a believer’s growth and also the Aim and Goal of his growth.”

Other more general teaching of the New Testament also reveals that Christlikeness is the pattern and goal for Christian sanctification.

Teaching of Christ

Jesus commanded His followers to learn from Him and to imitate His example: “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Followers of the Master become like Him, just as trainees show the influence of their trainer. “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Some surveys show that the example of a Christian teacher’s life is rated higher by the students as a major means of Christian nurture than a teacher’s lectures about Christian nurture. True, communicating biblical truth in understandable ways is essential if others are to grow, but the impact of biblical truth is reinforced by the truth lived in a human example. Thus the model of our Christian life may impact people more than the message of our lips, especially if we are a role model of Christlikeness as Paul was.

Jesus impacted His followers through His doing as well as through His teaching (Acts 1:1). He practiced humble service when He washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:5–14), and then He told them, “I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (13:15). None of the disciples would ever forget the Lord of glory on hands and knees washing their feet and the lesson in humble service they learned from Christ’s action (see 1 Pet. 5:5).

Through His works and words Jesus provided a flawless example for Christians to imitate. And He commands all who claim Him as Lord to obey Him, follow Him, and live like Him (Luke 6:46; 9:23; John 13:15).

Teaching of Paul

Christ was Paul’s spiritual model, and Paul challenged Christians to “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1; see also 1 Thess. 1:6). Imitation of Christ is not a way of salvation since no one can perfectly follow His example (Rom. 3:23). Christ is the ultimate model of godly living for the saved, but they must remember that any genuine imitation of Christ works “inside out.” Believers can manifest genuine Christlikeness only because Christ dwells in them and reproduces His character through them. The flesh can imitate but not duplicate Christlike characteristics. Imitation of Christlike characteristics by the flesh is like imitation fruit; it looks like the real thing but it is fake. A wax apple may look real, but tasting it is very different from tasting an actual apple. Fleshly imitations of Christlikeness always fail because God always distinguishes the artificial from the authentic.

Paul taught some practical guidelines for imitating Christ:

- Manifest Jesus Christ through your life.
- “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14) by developing and displaying Jesus’ virtues through the Spirit’s power.
- Live as Christ did for the benefit of others and not for self (Rom. 15:1–3).
- Represent Christ as His living letter so that people can learn about Jesus by observing your life (2 Cor. 3:3).
- Love sacrificially as Christ did by giving yourself to serve others (Eph. 5:2, 25).
- Have the humble attitude of Jesus with confidence that God will exalt you in His time (1 Pet. 5:6).
- Testify to unbelievers as Christ did with Spirit-filled boldness and winsomeness (1 Tim. 6:13).
Paul aimed for some specific objectives in His pursuit to know and experience Christ more, and he stated these objectives in Philippians 3:10: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” The apostle admitted that he had not yet attained perfect maturity in Christ (3:12). So we should not picture Paul standing on the elevated ledge of perfection and telling other Christians journeying upward that he had attained absolute perfection whereas they hadn’t. He was still running intensely in the Christian race toward the goal of perfect Christlikeness. He was definitely a “front runner” (probably the “front runner”) who kept pressing on to finish as a winner for Christ (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 3:13–14; 2 Tim. 4:7–8).

Teaching of the Writer to the Hebrews

In Hebrews Christ is most prominent as our Great High Priest who mediates the New Covenant, redeems His people, and represents them in heaven (Heb. 4:14; 5:9; 9:15). Christ our High Priest also sympathizes with our weaknesses and exemplifies victory over every type of temptation because He “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). Someone rightly said, “Jesus has walked in everyone’s shoes apart from sin.”

Jesus came to earth in human flesh (2:14, 17–18), lived in perfect holiness among humans (4:15; 7:26), and left us a flawless example to follow (12:2–3). And Hebrews reveals some practical ways to follow His example: overcome temptation (4:15), learn obedience through suffering (5:8), practice holy living (7:26), and (d) endure undeserved opposition (12:1–3).

Teaching of James

James is the “wisdom book” of the New Testament. The author emphasizes divine wisdom received through prayer (James 1:5–8), based on God’s “word of truth” (1:18), and contrasted with earthly wisdom (3:13–18). The wisdom of the Word sanctifies us when we receive and practice it (1:21–25). And the fruit of wisdom from the Word is “Christlikeness—peace, and humility and love (James 3:17).”

Teaching of Peter

Peter told suffering Christians, “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Christians need to know that through God’s grace they can endure suffering in a Christlike way (5:10, 12).

Peter commanded Christians to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Rejecting sin and receiving the Word are requirements to grow more Christlike (1 Pet. 2:1–2). Peter listed spiritual qualities beginning with “faith” (2 Pet. 1:5) and ending with “love” (1:7) which believers should cultivate and thereby reflect “true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” and imitation of His character (1:8).

Teaching of John

John taught that Christians should back up their claim of abiding in Christ by conducting themselves like Christ (1 John 2:6). When Christ comes we will be exactly “like Him” (3:2). In the meantime Christians should “abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (2:28). We also purify ourselves “just as He [Christ] is pure” by focusing our hope on His coming (3:3).

In Revelation John showed that Christ is our example of overcoming all earthly opposition (Rev. 11:15; 17:14; 19:15–20:15). Christians overcome all earthly opposition through faith in Christ (John 16:33), and they will share with Him in judging and ruling the world (1 Cor. 6:2–3; 1 John 5:4–5; Rev. 3:21; 5:10).

CHRISTIANS GLORIFY GOD BY BECOMING CHRISTLIKE THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

How can the goal of our sanctification be Christlikeness? Is not the chief end of man to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever? The goal of Christlikeness and the goal of glorifying God do not conflict when we see how they relate to each other. Christlikeness is the immediate goal of our sanctification. And Christlikeness is also our main means of glorifying God, our ultimate goal (1 Cor. 10:31). In other words, progress in sanctification makes us more Christlike, and the more Christlike we become the more we glorify God.

CHRISTIANS MUST CHANGE TO BECOME CHRISTLIKE

Commit to Spiritual Change in Your Life
To grow more like Christ, Christians need radical changes in their living just as some persons need radical surgery to become more healthy. Sometimes the only way to gain in holiness, as in physical health, is through pain. God used a painful trial in the apostle Paul’s life to develop more Christlike characteristics in him (2 Cor. 12:7–9). And God often uses pain in our lives to make us more like Christ. The spiritual gain is always worth the pain that God permits us to suffer.

You may agree mentally with the preceding paragraph, but do not underestimate your inclination to resist change, especially when change is painful. Our human nature balks at change even when we know that the change is for our spiritual benefit. Some Christians regard personal change the same way the comic regarded his impending death: “I really don’t mind dying; I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” And our real feeling is, “I don’t mind change so long as it doesn’t affect me.”

We resist change for many reasons. Change may disturb our desire to “sleep in” when we need to get up to spend vital time with the Lord. Change can bring extra burdens into our lives when we turn from a self-centered life to a life centered on others and their needs. Change can cause persecution for Christians who go public with their biblical convictions in opposition to popular opinion. We resist change for countless other reasons, and such resistance can slow and even stop sanctification, whereas receptivity to change accelerates it. So if you want unhindered sanctification, then be ready to make and accept the drastic changes God reveals in His Word and plans for your life, and God’s Spirit will accomplish those changes.

Use God’s Means for Spiritual Change in Your Life

In addition to the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in sanctification (as discussed in chapters 2–7), God provides Scripture, prayer, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines, circumstances, and other Christians to transform us into His image. We will consider each of these in more detail in later chapters.

We need to keep each means of sanctification in balance with the others so that we avoid a lopsided approach to our spiritual growth. We will neither neglect nor overemphasize any biblical means of sanctification if we give each means the same relative emphasis that Scripture does.

Some Christians emphasize praying, especially for pressing physical needs, more than learning and obeying God’s Word or ministering to God’s people. This unbalanced approach produces warped believers, lopsided Christian living, and limited spiritual growth.

By aiming for holistic Christian living and growth through a biblically balanced approach to sanctification, we avoid following the latest novel, radical, or faddish ideas about spirituality. Taking a radical approach to spiritual growth just to be controversial, outrageous, or noticed is actually self-centered rather than Christ-centered.

CHRISTIANS CAN MANIFEST CHRISTLIKENESS

To get a clearer picture of a Christlike Christian, we need to look at some specific characteristics of Christ as revealed in Scripture. Then we will see some specific ways to manifest Christlikeness through our Christian humanity.

Christlike Christians Manifest the Fruit of the Spirit

We see Jesus’ character beautifully portrayed in the Spirit’s fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). Jesus perfectly expressed these nine virtues because He was completely and continually Spirit-filled (Luke 4:1). We too must be Spirit-filled to manifest Christlike character through the fruit of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and thereby glorify the Father and the Son (John 15:8; 16:14).

Christlike Christians Love God and Their Neighbor

Christ showed perfect love for His Father by His obedience to death on the cross (John 14:31; Phil. 2:8). And by His sacrificial death, Jesus also showed His great love for people who are described as “helpless,” “ungodly,” “sinners,” and “enemies” in their unsaved condition (Rom. 5:6–10).

Paul prayed that Christians might understand more of the inexhaustible knowledge of Christ’s love (Eph. 3:18–19), But Christlike believers take a step further by loving God and people as Christ does (Matt. 22:37–39; John 13:34–35; 1 John 3:16).

We need more than mere human power to love the way Jesus loves. God met our need by giving us the Spirit to produce His kind of love in and through us (Rom. 5:5). Spirit-filled Christians are empowered to love God, fellow Christians, and other humans, including even their enemies, with supernatural love (Gal. 5:22).
Loving other Christians requires our accepting them just as Jesus has accepted us as spiritual children of God and fellow members of Christ’s body. Unbelievers or sinners are still our neighbors, and therefore we are to love them also (Matt. 22:39). Loving unbelievers or sinners as Christ did requires receiving them but not their sin or sinful lifestyle. We should not use the qualification, “but not their sin or sinful lifestyle,” as a hypocritical cover-up for an attitudinal rejection of sinners. Jesus’ love and acceptance of others was genuine in action and attitude.

Despised sinners, social and religious rejects, and oppressed groups were drawn to Jesus. For instance Luke 15:1–2 states, “Now all the tax gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. and both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ ” While Jesus was morally “separated from sinners” (Heb. 7:26), He had physical contact with them and socialized with them, and Israel’s religious leaders condemned Jesus’ relationship with “sinners” (7:36–39, esp. v. 39; 15:2). And Christ condemned the hypocritical practices of these religious leaders (Matt. 23:13–15).

Women and children felt that Jesus accepted and cared for them. He treated women as equal in value to men and showed them personal attention. A group of women faithfully followed Jesus, ministered to Him, and observed His final suffering (Matt. 27:55–56), and some women were associated with His burial and His resurrection (27:61; 28:1–10). These women were deeply devoted to Him because they knew He genuinely cared for them (see 1 John 4:19). A Christian man shows Christlikeness more by how he treats women and children than by how he treats his “good old buddies.”

In Jesus’ life we see perfect love expressed toward God and people. And the Spirit can radiate that love through us. When we have Spirit-produced love, we take seriously the two great commandments (Matt. 22:37–40), we reflect Christlike character (Gal. 5:22), we show people we are Christ’s followers (John 13:34–35), and we have proper motivation to serve others (Gal. 5:13).

Christlike Christians Do the Father’s Will

Doing the Father’s will was Christ’s driving passion: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). All that Jesus thought, said, and did was in God’s will, and therefore He could say, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (8:29). Christians can imitate Christ’s response to the Father’s will in four main ways.

First, in His preincarnate state Christ declared His desire to do God’s will: “I delight to do Thy will, O my God” (Ps. 40:8). Doing God’s will was His pleasure and not an irksome task or even something He did simply from duty. The more Christlike we become, the more we desire and delight to do God’s will.

Second, Christ came into the world to do God’s will, and He knew that God’s will included severe suffering for sinners (John 6:38; Heb. 10:5–10). Though Christ was perfect and deserved to be appreciated, He came not to be appreciated but to accomplish His Father’s will. And doing His Father’s will led to rejection (John 1:11) and death by crucifixion (Matt. 26:42). The main purpose of Christlike Christians is not to receive appreciation or to please people but to accomplish the Father’s will at any cost (Rom. 12:1–2).

Third, Jesus gave the Father’s will priority over His own will and personal needs (John 4:31–34; 6:38). For Christlike Christians, doing the Father’s will is at the top of their “to do” list, and no personal sacrifice is too great and no task is too difficult to achieve the Father’s will. God expects and enables His people to know and do His will, and God promises us wonderful benefits for doing His will.

Fourth, Christ persevered in God’s will. Even when facing crucifixion for the sins of the world, Jesus said to the Father, “Not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus was on a mission, and He would return to heaven only when His mission was accomplished on earth (John 17:4; 19:30). Christlike Christians seek to follow God’s will and to allow nothing to distract or derail them from doing His will.

How we answer the three following questions will help us gauge how Christlike our response to God’s will is:

- Are we committed to doing the Father’s will, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else? Do we have a deep desire, delight, and determination to do the Father’s will so that His will takes priority over our will and even our personal needs?
- Do we include the pursuit of sanctification as an essential part of persevering in God’s will for our life?

Christlike Christians Serve Others

When Christians have Spirit-produced love, they care for others and serve them as Jesus did. Jesus came to serve sacrificially and not to be served (Matt. 20:28). Though He was the disciples’ Lord, Leader, and Teacher, He told them, “I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27). Picture the Lord of glory stooping down to wash His disciples’ dirty feet (John 13:3–17). He took the role of the lowest household servant and presented a show-and-tell lesson in humbly serving others. The disciples could see, hear, and feel Jesus’ ministry to them, and they never
forgot it. Christ applied His teaching about humble service to His followers in their cultural context. “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (13:14–15). The transcultural principle to be drawn from Jesus’ teaching is summarized in Paul’s command, “through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

The vivid memory of Jesus serving others was deeply embedded in Peter’s mind. Over thirty years after this foot-washing event, Peter exhorted Christians to “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (1 Pet. 5:5). The Greek word rendered “clothe yourselves” is a rare word that refers to a slave putting on an apron before serving. So Christians are to imitate their Lord, who girded himself and served (John 13:4–17).

No external pressure or impure motive moved Jesus to perform the ultimate service of dying for us (John 10:17–18). Love for His Father (14:31), for His own (13:1; Eph. 5:25), and for the world (John 3:16) was why He went to the cross and paid the price with His very life. The same love for God and humans must motivate our service for others. Otherwise even the most sacrificial service profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:2–3).

People often remember the simplest acts of service done for them, especially by those who serve out of love for Christ and expect nothing in return for their service. I have observed at the funerals of Christians that the most prominent memories of a person are whether he or she was Christlike in character and faithful in service. And that is what counts most before the Lord because He commends and rewards the “good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, NIV).

How do you know if you are rendering Christlike service produced by the Spirit? If you can truly say, “I would be content if only the Lord and I knew about my service to others,” then probably your service comes from the pure motive of Spirit-produced love. And Christians can have confidence that Jesus does perfectly remember and reward even their simplest acts of service done in His name (10:42). Consider the promise of Hebrews 6:10, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

The more Christians become like Christ through sanctification, the more they can serve Him. This does not mean that only “super Christians” can serve the Lord. New Christians as well as mature Christians can serve the Lord in appropriate ways. Still, spiritual growth to greater Christlikeness does enhance our Christian service.

**Christlike Christians Evangelize Unbelievers**

The more Christlike we become, the more we share Lord’s compassion for people and their needs. His compassion included the needs of the whole person, but He focused on the spiritual needs of people (Mark 2:1–12; 14:7). His passion was for lost people to be saved and then trained as disciples. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Presenting the gospel with Spirit-empowered love is a primary way we show Christlike compassion.

Christlike evangelism should produce new converts, who then need to grow spiritually. And Christlike maturity should produce Christlike evangelism, which again produces new converts. And as these new converts grow and evangelize others, the cycle starts over again. The Lord used this cyclical pattern when He trained His disciples so that they could make new disciples, and these new disciples could make still other disciples (Matt. 28:19–20; see 2 Tim. 2:2).

Manifesting Christlike qualities is the measure of a believer’s sanctification. Asking, “How much have I progressed in sanctification?” is the same as asking, “How Christlike am I?” So the measure of our progress in sanctification and the measure of our personal growth in Christlikeness read the same on God’s scale.¹