

6. No Limits to the Spirit's Work

On Fire with the Holy Spirit

Warm-up question: Who was your favorite superhero as a kid? What did you like about him or her?

Our Identity in Christ

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 of the person of Christ and His claims of eternal life. If that is the case, you may have been disillusioned as to what you perceived as a 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. When I hear a story like that, I know that they could not have met the Lord Jesus Christ! The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that they have received the gift of life from the Lord Jesus the day they believed. This new life has come because the Spirit of God is now living within you if you are a believer and have entrusted your life to Christ.

It is possible to become “inoculated” to true biblical Christianity by receiving a “shot of religion,” the enemy of our souls gives us a vaccine that produces immunity to the real thing. When we grow up in a religious environment devoid of knowledge about what God has done for us through the death and resurrection of Christ, we do not get the true picture. Often people do not understand about the New Birth and baptism into the Body of Christ. We are like the Superman comic stories of Clark Kent with Kryptonite wrapped around our minds keeping us from understanding the power available to us. Every Christian has incredible power at their disposal, but for many of us, our thoughts are restrained from seeing our potential in Christ. This strategy is a widespread tactic of the enemy and one he uses to keep God's people from walking in the power of their identity in Christ. When we do not understand the authority we have as God's children, we abdicate that power and settle for lives that are far less than what we could be experiencing.

We are like the landowner in Texas during the Great Depression who went through years of poverty only to find out that great oilfields were under his feet, I don't think his name was Jed Clampett though. Great wealth and resources were on his land, and he did not know it, but all he had to do was go deep. As a pastor, I come across many people that could be used a great deal more than they are at present. Unused potential is widespread in America. I have often thought that it would be wonderful to get ordinary Christians like many of us, to a different country where God is on the move. I would like to see many launched into needy situations where they are forced by circumstances to depend on God to move by His power. What amazing stories there would be!

When I was just a young believer and leading a house church, a pastor of a regular church 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. His chin hit the floor when he realized I was his guest speaker for the evening church service. He was shocked as he looked down at me when he came to the door. He was surprised at my youth, saying, "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 lack of experience. Walking with God happens when we take one step at a time, and He can use whomever 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 what we know or how much wisdom we have acquired; God loves to use those who are just babies in their new faith.

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 meant 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:

"...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).

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—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).

I believe that the least in the kingdom of heaven refers to one that has just stepped into a relationship with Christ. One who 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 incredible 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 us to the God who has created us for His glory. The Christian vows to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and strength. There are many benefits to those who bind themselves by covenant to the God of Israel. 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). God calls us 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.**" ³²This is a profound mystery—but **I am talking about Christ and the church** (Ephesians 5:31-32).

A Christian is one 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. God calls you into a marriage union with 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! The apostle Paul wrote:

²⁵I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—²⁶the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is **now disclosed to the saints.** ²⁷To 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 the saints be that Paul is writing to in this passage? What is the mystery revealed to them?

Paul's usage of the word *saints* is not just about the super spiritual ones we read about in books, those 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 who believe even before the foundation of the world was laid (Ephesians 1:11). 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 sees beyond one's

capabilities and looks to the power of the Holy Spirit resident within us. Here's how the apostle Paul put it:

¹⁷I 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. ¹⁸I 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, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power *for us who believe*. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far 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. ²²And 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 His 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), and seeks to influence the church that we might be blind to 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 each of us in different ways if we will step out and trust him. With the relationship of oneness with Christ, the authority and power given to Him has also been given to us as His representatives. We re-present him! No matter how young or old we are in Christ. Let me illustrate:

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 record-breaking 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 Bannister proved 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 supply 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.*

Are you aware of having set limitations on yourself? 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?

²⁸When 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. ²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "**According to your faith will it be done to you**"; ³⁰and 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 our inadequacies and ourselves and we refuse to believe that God can use us. The enemy will play on our doubts and plant thoughts in our mind that limit us to believing, not that God *can* use us, but that He will.

What kinds of thoughts limit us from expecting anything from God?

There are three things that I can think of that severely limit us:

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

- 1) **Our view of God.** If we believe that God no longer moves by His Spirit in power today, we limit His 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 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 can 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 work in us and through us powerfully.

What negative words come to mind that has 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 urge 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:

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. 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 see 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 a 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 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:

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:

¹⁵He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶Whoever **believes** and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will accompany **those who believe**: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they 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." ¹⁹After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰Then **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 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?

Father, I pray that you would open the spiritual eyes of each of us to see all that we can be in Christ. Take away every limit that hinders us from walking a godly life in You. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com