

ACCORDING TO THE **POWER** THAT WORKETH IN US

This morning, we are going to go back to the series I have somewhat lightheartedly entitled: *Are You Going to Thrive—or Merely Survive—in 2025?* Although the title is obviously a bit “corny,” the **point** behind it is not! We have **a choice**—we can **directly affect**—what kind of year we are going to have in the **spiritual** arena.

Here’s what we’ve looked at so far. First, we noted from John 10:10, that Jesus said that He came that we “might have life—and that we might have it more **abundantly!**” What did Jesus mean by an **abundant** life? Is He just talking about our future life **in heaven?**

No; He is also talking about our life here on earth **before** we get to heaven!

Was Jesus saying that our life here on earth would be characterized by an abundance of **health...or wealth...or possessions...or power?** No; that’s not what He meant!

Was Jesus saying we would have a **care-free, trouble-free, worry-free life?** No; that’s not what Jesus meant either! What Jesus **was saying** is this: We can have a **contented, joy-filled, victorious Christian life** where we experience first-hand the **presence** and **power** of God in our lives!

We then looked at the overwhelming evidence—seen by verses from **every one** of the 27 books in the New Testament—that demonstrates God’s desire for us to have certain **attitudes**...and **do** certain things...and **not do** certain things **after** we become His child.

God’s desire...His goal...His plan for us after we are born again is to be “conformed to the image of His Son” the Bible says in Romans 8:29. According to **II Corinthians 5:17**, we are to be different: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are **passed away**; behold, **all things are become new.**”

Is that true **of us?** Are we a new “creature”—a new creation? Have **old things** passed away—and have **all things** become new? We’re not there yet, are we? We have not arrived!

And so—if we honestly evaluate our lives in light of God’s desire for us to **be like Jesus**—we ought to whole-heartedly agree with this quote from Paul Tripp that I gave you a couple of weeks ago: “The Christian life is a state of **thankful discontent** or **joyful dissatisfaction**. That is, I live every day **thankful for the grace** that has changed my life, but I am **not satisfied**. Why not? Because, when I look at myself honestly, I have to admit that I am not all I can be in Christ.”

Thirdly, we looked at the **possibility** of change as seen in the life of Paul. He was converted from a Christian hater—and hunter—to being a preacher of the faith he once destroyed! But Paul doesn’t just serve **as proof** that a person can be changed—God used him to teach us about **the power** behind his transformation. We talked about that two weeks ago and we’re going to look at that again here this morning.

I realize some of you may be thinking that I’m being **overly redundant** because I keep reviewing what we’ve looked at previously—and **sometimes say** some of the same things I’ve **already said!** Please know that there is “a method to my madness” and I’m doing it on purpose for **three** reasons.

First, God’s Word has a lot to say about growing in Christ-likeness. Since God **talks** about it a lot, He must want us to **think** about it a lot!

Second, we all think a little bit **differently**. Based on that, sometimes the **same truth**—said in a slightly different way—will “click” while looking at one verse where maybe it didn’t when we looked at a different vs.

Third, true born-again believers want to change—God puts that in us—but many don’t **know how**. And some have “given up” in frustration! In the words of Dr. Rick Taylor, they are “hopelessly stuck in the whirlpool of do good, try hard and fail.” So it is important that we go slow so we can carefully “chew on it” as we go!

The first truth we are going to look at is... **1. The person of the Holy Spirit indwells all true believers**
Let’s take our Bibles and turn to Romans 8.

Even though we looked at this passage a couple of weeks ago, it is important that we understand—and are **convinced of**—the truth that God the **Holy Spirit is in every child** of God! Notice what it says in vs 8-9: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the **Spirit of God** dwell in you. Now if any man have not the **Spirit of Christ**, he is none of His.”

--Who—according to verse 9—dwells in believers? The Spirit of **God**—and the Spirit of **Christ**! Is Paul referring to **two** different Spirits? No; the Spirit **of God** and the Spirit **of Christ** are being used interchangeably—and both refer to the **Holy Spirit**!

--Now vs 10. “And if **Christ be in you**, the body is dead because of sin; but the **Spirit is life** because of righteousness.” Here again we see “Christ” being used interchangeably with “the Spirit.”

--So **Christ is in us** because the **Holy Spirit is in us**—and the Holy Spirit produces Christ’s Spirit in us.

Question: Look again at vs 9. Can a person be a child of God if the Spirit of God is not in them? **No!**

“If any man **have not the Spirit** of Christ—the Holy Spirit—he is “none of His”—meaning that person is not a child of God in the family of God!

Now vs 11. “But if the **Spirit of Him** that raised up Jesus from the dead **dwell in you**, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by **His Spirit** that **dwelleth in you**.”

The certainty—the guarantee—that true believers will someday be raised up—and have a glorified body like the body of Jesus—is based on the fact that we already have—**in us**—the same Spirit that raised up Jesus!

And since the Spirit of God is **powerful enough** to raise Jesus from the dead—He is able to **raise us** from the dead! And if He is able to raise us **from the dead**, He is certainly able to **change us and make us** more like Christ during our time here on earth!

Here are some more verses that emphasize the Holy Spirit—or **Christ**—being in us.

I Corinthians 6:19 “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the **Holy Ghost which is in you**, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

Galatians 2:20 “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but **Christ liveth in me**...”

Colossians 1:27 “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.”

I John 4:4 “...because greater is **He that is in you**, than he that is in the world.”

I John 4:13 “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and **He in us**, because He hath given **us of His Spirit**.”

Before we leave this passage, notice what it says in vs 12: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” What is Paul saying? “Therefore”—because the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, we are **not debtors**—we are not under obligation—to live selfish, sinful, flesh-driven lives!

2. The power behind transformation is the Holy Spirit that indwells us

Here again **is a quote** I gave you two weeks ago from a book entitled *The Anatomy of a Disciple* by Dr. Rick Taylor: “The first thing you have to **understand and believe** if you are going to experience authentic life change, and be a more complete image bearer of God [meaning Christ-like] in this world, is that all genuine, authentic life change **begins with God**. Not you. **He is the change agent**. Not you.... As long as you think and live as if it’s **up to you**, you will be hopelessly stuck in the whirlpool of do good, try hard and fail. Until you let go of the subtle idea that **it’s all up to you**, you are still trying to be **your own functional savior** and will never truly become like Christ” (Page 27; emphasis mine).

Pretty hard to miss Dr. Taylor’s point, isn’t it? **God** is the One who brings about change—not us! But more important than what **book writers** say is what **God Himself tells us** in His Word! And **Who** does God say is the agent of change; **the One** who brings it about? **He Himself—in the person of the Holy Spirit!** And He repeats this truth numerous times! We’re going to again look at some of the verses we went through a couple of weeks ago.

Take your Bibles and turn now to the book of Galatians. Notice what it says in Gal 2:8...

Galatians 2:8 “(For He that **wrought effectually** in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was **mighty in me** toward the Gentiles:)

--Who is the “He” that wrought effectually—who worked effectively—in Peter? **God!**

--Who was “mighty” in Paul? The same One that worked in Peter—**God!**

Now turn to Galatians 3. Notice what it says in vs 2. Paul is asking them, ‘How is it that the Holy Spirit came to indwell you? Did you receive Him by the works of the law (by doing)—or by putting your faith in Christ?’

The answer is obvious—by trusting in Christ!

Now vs 3. “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

‘Since you began your spiritual life by the work of the Holy Spirit, do you think you can **perfect** yourself—complete yourself and make yourself mature and more Christ-like—by your own self-efforts?’

The answer is obviously **NO**—you can’t—and you are being foolish to try!

And that is precisely why the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us! The Holy Spirit isn’t in us just to “hang out” until God tells Him to resurrect us and give us a new body when Jesus comes back to get us! He is in us to **change us**...to **conform** us to the image of Christ...to **transform** us...to **live His life** in us!

Turn now to chapter 5. Notice what it says in vs 22-23. We are to **desire these things**—we should want to be characterized by these things—but God the Holy Spirit is the One who actually **produces** them.

And then there is what I would consider the most easily understood verse regarding God’s work in us—**Philippians 2:13** “For it is God which worketh **in you** both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

It can’t be much plainer than this: **God** works in us to give us both **the desire**—and **the ability**—to do that which pleases Him! We—in and of ourselves—don’t have either!

Here are a few more references to God’s **working in us** through the person and power of the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 3:16 “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might **by His Spirit in the inner man;**”

Ephesians 3:20 “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power **that worketh in us,**”

Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath **begun a good work in you** will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”

All these verses remind us that it is God’s power that works in us to change us—we don’t change ourselves.

Lastly, I think it is important to understand this truth...

3. The “grace of God” sometimes refers to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit

Why is it important that we understand this truth? Because God tells us—in a slightly different way—that He works in us—and we **often don’t see** that that is what He is saying! You’ll “see” what I mean as we look at some rather familiar verses.

Before we do that, though, I want us to think about how we usually define “grace.” Grace is often defined as “undeserved favor”—God abundantly giving us what we don’t deserve. It encompasses not only the **gift of salvation**, but also the many blessings that God gives us in conjunction with our salvation. I’ve shared with you before that some use the **acrostic** G-R-A-C-E to define what grace means: **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**.

But...that’s **not all it means**—and you’ll see that the definition of “underserved favor” doesn’t always fit the context of how God led Paul to use it—especially in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. We’re in Galatians; please turn toward the front of your Bibles—but not far—to the book of I Corinthians, chapter 15.

Notice what it says in I Corinthians 15:9-10. “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the **grace of God** I am what I am: and **His grace** which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the **grace of God** which was with me.” Paul had been a persecutor; he was now a preacher.

The **grace of God**—God’s undeserved favor—was what led to God reaching down and “arresting” Saul/Paul when he was in the process of arresting believers. But we also see in this verse that it was the **grace of God** that led Paul to “labor more abundantly” than the other apostles. Was he bragging? No; he was giving to credit to “the grace of God”—not himself! It was the **grace of God** working with him and in him.

Now turn to II Corinthians 1, just a page or two from where you are right now. Notice what it says in vs 12: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but **by the grace of God**, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.”

Let’s think through what Paul is saying. According to vs 1, this letter is from both Paul and Timothy—and that is who is meant by the “our” in vs 12. “Conversation” toward the end of the verse means more than just what they “conversed” about—it refers to **their behavior**, their manner of life. And Paul says our manner of life was characterized by simplicity and godliness because of **what?** The “grace of God!”

It wasn’t wisdom—and it wasn’t willpower! It was **God working in him** to live a God-honoring life.

Now let’s turn to chapter 9; look at what it says in II Corinthians 9:8 “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”

--**Who** was able to make grace abound toward them? **God**

--**What** was the **grace of God** going to enable them to do? Abound in every good work. In other words, they will be able to do what pleases God—kind of like Philippians 2:13!

Now II Corinthians 12 where Paul tells the Corinthians—and us—about his thorn in the flesh. Notice what it says in vs 8. ‘I asked God to remove it 3 times.’

God’s response to Paul is in vs 9: “And He [God] said unto me, My **grace** is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Let’s stop right there. God is saying that **the grace** that He gives is **strength!** God’s **grace** is God’s **strength** that enables us to handle difficulties with joy!

Notice now Paul’s response in the 2nd half of the verse: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the **power of Christ** may rest upon me.” The point is this: God’s **grace**—in this context—is God’s strength, which is also called “the power of Christ.”

Paul’s response continues in vs 10: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

--Has Paul “lost his mind” when he says he **takes pleasure in things** that most of us desperately try to avoid? No; he has not gone **crazy!** Is he **confused** because he says he is weak and strong at the same time?

How can Paul be **opposite things** at the same time? Because when **he himself is weak**, he is **depending on the grace of God**—the power and strength of Christ **in him**—to do what is impossible for him to do!

So...**the grace of God**—in addition to meaning the goodness God extends to us in providing salvation—also is the **power behind our transformation**. Maybe you caught that same truth in the quote I gave you earlier from Paul Tripp: “The Christian life is a state of thankful discontent or joyful dissatisfaction. That is, I live every day **thankful for the grace** that has changed my life, but I am **not satisfied**.”

John Van Gelderen put it like this: “Grace is the supernatural enabling through the Holy Spirit to do God’s will.” (*Engine Truths*, pg 35)

I’ve said it before, but here it is again: The Christian life is not about us becoming more self-controlled and self-disciplined—it is about **God changing us**. It is about **God doing in us** what we cannot do.

--We “get it” that we cannot **save ourselves**—that is God’s doing!

--And we “get it” that we cannot possibly **glorify ourselves** and make our own bodies fit for heaven! But it is **difficult for us to understand** that we can’t “grow ourselves” because God tells us we **have a responsibility** in the growth process. Next week we will begin to look at what our responsibility is.

This morning, I want to end with a quote from C.S. Lewis' book entitled, *The Weight of Glory*. Lewis wrote: "Our Lord finds our desires **not** too strong, but **too weak**. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and [physical lust] and ambition when **infinite joy is offered us**, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (<https://tifwe.org/c-s-lewiss-famous-mud-pies-how-imagination-opens-the-heart-to-truth>; emphasis mine)

Interesting thoughts, aren't they? "We are too easily pleased." We settle for a mediocre, mud-pie filled life when God longs to give us so much more! We have rewritten Jesus' words to say, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more **miserably!**"

Don't settle! Be thankfully discontent...be joyfully dissatisfied...and believe what we are told in **Ephesians 3:20** "Now unto Him that is able to do **exceeding abundantly above** all that we ask or think, according to the **power that worketh in us,**"

So what would God have us do about what we've heard this morning?

1. First, we need to honestly consider this question: do you sense God's Spirit working in you? Do you sense within you a desire to do right—and a desire not to sin?

--If not, the Holy Spirit is not in you. And if the Holy Spirit is not in you, you are not a child of God!

--And if you do not become a child of God in **this** life, you won't be in the **next** life!

Instead of entering heaven, you will hear from Jesus Himself, "Depart from me—I never knew you." And you will be separated from Him forever in a place called hell!

2. If you are saved, God wants you to have an abundant life. Don't be satisfied with mud-pies; don't be too easily pleased. Ask Him to change you—and trust in Him to do that—because He is in you and "nothing is impossible with God."