

The Holy Spirit | This Same Power

“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” | Romans 8:11, ESV

*“...This is my [Paul’s] prayer. That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of Him: that you may receive that **inner illumination of the Spirit** which will make you realise how great is the hope to which He is calling you—the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how **tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God**. That power is **the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when He raised him from the dead** and gave him the place of supreme honour in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.” | Ephesians 1:18-21, JB Phillips*

The Spirit has been intricately linked with humanity’s story, from the very beginning. It was God’s Spirit that brought the world into being (Genesis 1:2). It was God’s Spirit that empowered men and women in both the Old and New Testament times to prophesy, decipher dreams, possess extraordinary talent and knowledge, and undertake great feats of courage and action (Genesis 40:8, 41:38, Exodus 31:1-6, Judges 3:10, Judges 6:34, Luke 2:25-26, Luke 2:36-38). It was God’s Spirit that sparked conception in Mary’s womb, bringing about the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:30-37). Jesus’ veracity as God’s Son and the revelation that he was sent ‘to take away the sin

of the world' were both affirmed by the Spirit (John 1:29-34). And it was the Spirit of God that [raised Jesus from the dead](#) (Mark 16:9, Romans 8:11).

This same Spirit, the Apostle Paul assures us, dwells in all those who have [surrendered to Jesus](#) as their King and Saviour, empowering and transforming their lives too (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:18-21).

Our story, when we choose to become Christian believers, echos the incredible story of creation and the work of the Holy Spirit in the very beginning. The story of creation is our first glimpse into a story that is retold throughout the Bible; that of bringing life and light out of darkness, through the action of God's Spirit, and often connected with the medium of water.

The Creation Of The World

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." | Genesis 1:1-2, NIV

The heavens and the earth lay empty. We're not told how they came to be this way. We're only given a description of complete nothing-ness – a wasteland of darkness. The Hebrew words used in these verses convey the idea of desolation (*tō·hū*), an undistinguishable ruin (*wā·bō·hū*). Yet, where we would see hopelessness, God sees possibility. Out of chaos, disorder, and darkness, He brings order, light, and life.

It's into this dark chaos that the Spirit of God breaths. Hovering over the waters like a bird brooding over her young ones, the Spirit of God moves over the face of the deep, poised to begin His creative work.

The Hebrew word for 'spirit' (*wə·rū·ah*) can refer to a number

of different things. We may tend to think of it as simply breath or wind and sometimes it does mean that. But it's also used to convey more. Energy, vitality, strength, breath (as in, animating power), mind, or even life can all be meant by the word *wə·rū·aḥ*. The Biblical authors also used this word to describe God's personal Presence. Just as wind or breath is invisible, so God's Spirit is invisible; just as wind has power, God's Spirit is powerful; just as we're kept alive by breath, all things are sustained by God's Spirit (Micah 3:8-10, Ecclesiastes 11:5, Acts 2:1-5, Job 34:14-16).

The use of the word *hovering* or *brooding* in Genesis (also translated as '*fluttering lovingly*') gives us a clue as to the more complex nature of God's Spirit. God's Spirit is not just energy, like some kind of electrical current, but is His divine personal Presence, the sum of all His will, His consciousness, His emotion, His character, and His power. His Spirit is of Him and *is* Him. He is everywhere by His Spirit. As the Psalmist poetically exclaims, there is nowhere we can go where God's Spirit is not. This is a concept not easily understood by our human minds.

"Where can I flee from your Spirit? Or where will I run from your presence? If I rise to heaven, there you are! If I lay down with the dead, there you are! If I take wings with the dawn and settle down on the western horizon, your hand will guide me there too, while your right hand keeps a firm grip on me. If I say, "darkness will surely conceal me, and the light around me will become night," even darkness isn't dark to you, darkness and light are the same to you." | Psalm 139: 7-12, ISV

God personally inhabits the creative work that takes place in Genesis. It is His Spirit that empowers life, light, knowledge, beauty, creativity, joy, goodness, fruitfulness, and blessings (Genesis 1:31). It was His Spirit that brought life and order out of chaos and darkness. Everything seen and

unseen is called into being by His Spirit and continues to exist by being connected to His Spirit (Job 34:14-16).

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; their starry host by the breath of His mouth.” | Psalm 33:6, NIV

‘Whereby The World That Then Was Being Overflowed With Water Perished’

This good world that God breathed into life did not remain that way for long. Genesis 6 paints a grim picture of a world that had fallen once more into chaos, disarray, and spiritual darkness.

Some 1600 years after creation, the world had become so evil that God regretted He had ever made humans (Genesis 6:6). In fact, it broke His heart. His Spirit, everything that is good and right, was sustaining a creation that was ‘rotten to the core’ (Genesis 6:5) and which was actively striving against God’s Spirit (Genesis 6:3). The Hebrew meaning behind Genesis 6:5 is that it was not only the imagination of humans that had been corrupted but their purposes and desires too. They had brought darkness and ruin into the world to the point where God’s Spirit, which sustained all things, including humanity, would no longer choose to sustain such evil.

Genesis 6-8 provides the narrative of the catastrophe that came upon humanity. The ‘world that then was’ was completely erased by water and all in whom the ‘spirit of life’ resided perished (Genesis 7:22).

“And every living thing on the face of the earth was destroyed – man and livestock, crawling creatures and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth, and only Noah remained, and those with him in the ark.” | Genesis 7:23, BSB

*"...that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."
| 2 Peter 3:5-6, AKJV*

Only Noah, who had '[walked with God](#)' and his family were saved (Genesis 9:6). The phrase 'walked with God' recalls, perhaps, the original unity of the relationship between humanity and God, where God had 'walked in the cool of Eden's garden' alongside humans (Genesis 3:8). This unity was disrupted when Adam and Eve, grasping at equality with God, acted in opposition to God's will, resulting in them being banished from the garden and God's Presence. 'Walking with God' is often used throughout the Bible as an expression of returning to a unified relationship with God. It's what we were created for and what God has always intended for all of humanity.

"For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them." | Ephesians 2:10, NIV

Born Again Of Water And Spirit

It is over this vast emptiness of water that we once again see a bird hovering, signaling God's Presence (Genesis 8:8-17). 'The world that then was' had been born again of water and spirit, washed clean and ready for hope and the regeneration of life.

*"Then he [Noah] sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was **a freshly plucked olive***

leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.” | Genesis 8: 8-12, NIV

Centuries pass. The Spirit of God moves powerfully through the ebb and flow of the history of humanity. His intention for His creation will not be thwarted and He will walk with humanity again in a whole and restored relationship. The way He will accomplish this is, of course, through His Son, Jesus.

Jesus | The New Creation

God steps personally into our drama by sending His Son. The Word, the expression of God, the sum of all His will, His consciousness, His emotion, His character, and His power was poured out and made human (John 1:14).

John, the author of the fourth gospel account in the New Testament, deliberately parallels the Genesis account when beginning his record of this pivotal moment in human history; [the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God](#). He tells us that ‘*in the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was **with** God, and the Word **was** God*’ (John 1:1). The use of the word *logos* here is deeply connected to who God is, to the very nature and essence of God, containing within itself the ability to intelligently and lovingly create and sustain life.

Interestingly, perhaps because of the lofty and soaring theology contained in his writings, the apostle John is often symbolised by an eagle, reminding us once again of a bird, brooding over dark waters, poised and waiting to create.

That ‘Word’, and all that is contained by the expression, became a human and ‘dwelt among us’. He was ‘*God-With-Us*’ – and anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God’s glory; the exact representation of His being (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11). In him, was life and the light of men (John 1:4).

He is the Light that shines in the darkest places of the human heart, bringing peace to the chaos and order and beauty again. That human, of course, was Jesus.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” | 2 Corinthians 4:6, KJV

Jesus was human like us. And yet, there was something different about him too. [He was a man, but not merely a man.](#) In him, ‘the entire fullness (completeness) of God dwelt in bodily form’ (Colossians 2:9). [Jesus was a new kind of creation](#), a new kind of human and he came to show us how we can be a new kind of human too.

“The first man was named Adam, and the Scriptures tell us that he was a living person. But Jesus, who may be called the last Adam, is a life-giving Spirit.” | 1 Corinthians 15:45, NIV

Jesus came preaching the good news of salvation, of reconciliation with God, of being able to walk with God in complete harmony again. Jesus enters the tablet of human history like a blazing fire, burning away all that is false and bringing to light that which is true (Malachi 3:2-3).

There is a new reality, he affirms, one where God rules completely in the hearts of humanity and this reality, he proclaims, is right now! The kingdom of God had arrived and this new kind of living would ignite like fire in people’s hearts (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:15)

It is early in his ministry that Jesus demonstrates how this new kind of living begins. He comes to Jordan, where John the Baptist was preaching the baptism of repentance. John’s baptism was first intended to bring people to an

acknowledgment and repentance of sin.

But John also tells the crowds that a little water would mean nothing if they weren't prepared to change their lives. Baptism needed to ignite the kingdom life within a believer, renewing men and women from the inside out. They needed to be 'born again', of [water and of spirit](#).

Jesus showed exactly what this looked like. Although He didn't need baptism for the forgiveness of sin – he never committed any, he still participated in the baptism of repentance, to 'fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). He demonstrated clearly what would be required of all humanity (the act of [belief and baptism](#)) to be able to participate in this new kingdom life.

Upon rising from the water, the Spirit of God came to rest upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaiming '*this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*' (Matthew 3:16). This was a public demonstration of not just the validity of Jesus as God's son but also how all believers who participate in this new creative work would experience rebirth by God's Spirit.

Not long after his baptism, Jesus confirms the significance and importance of being 'born again of water and spirit'. He speaks with Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and leader of the Jews. Nicodemus believed Jesus to truly be a teacher who had come from God and Jesus takes the opportunity to reaffirm that being reborn of water and spirit is an essential part of becoming a new creation, and 'entering the kingdom of God' (John 3:5).

The baptism of Jesus is another beautiful echo of the story first told to us in Genesis, where God's Spirit hovered like a bird over the waters, before beginning His incredible creative work. It also recalls the story of the washing and regeneration of the world in Noah's day and the new life that

was signaled by the flight of a dove above the waters.

New Life By The Spirit

The truth is, what really needs washing clean is the human heart. The innermost part of humanity, where God wants to be completely at one with us, was separated from God by Adam and Eve's choices. The human heart lies in darkness and chaos and only God's Spirit can bring life and light to this disordered place (Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:21-22).

As it was *in the beginning*, the chaos and darkness that is in our lives can be washed clean and reordered. Regeneration, to be born anew, is the termination of people of the old creation with all their deeds and the germination of them in the new creation with the divine life. We take all of the darkness, failure, chaos, and ruin of our life and surrender it to God, who erases it in the water of baptism (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6).

Light enters the darkness. That light is Jesus and he brings the knowledge of God into our hearts.

“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” | 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, ESV

New life is ignited in us and the new human is reborn. Yet this new life does not come without the promise of help (Ephesians 1:13-14). Jesus tells his disciples that God will send them a comforter to teach and guide them in this new kingdom life. They will be empowered and sustained by nothing less than the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit; the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and **He will give you another Helper to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.** The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” | John 14:15-16, 26, ESV*

*“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, **and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** This promise belongs to you and your children and to all who are far off – to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself. With many other words he testified, and he urged them, “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” Those who embraced his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to the believers that day” | Acts 2:38-41, BSB*

*“He redeemed us in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive **the promise of the Spirit.**” | Galatians 3:14, BSB*

When Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the good news to the world, making disciples of all nations, he gave them the following instruction:

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in **the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” | Matthew 28:19-20, NIV*

Holy Spirit | This Same Power

The mechanism by which we are renewed, as Christians, is no different from that in the past. It is God's Spirit, which has been *with* God and *is* God since the beginning, and by which everything seen and unseen was created.

Having surrendered our own self-will, we are instructed to ask, as little children would from a parent, for the gift of God's Spirit to come and 'make His home with us' (Luke 11:13, John 14:23). In our new kingdom life, we are directed by God's Spirit in the face of evil and doubt and are strengthened by the teachings of His written Word, the Bible (John 14:16-17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We are filled with faith and hope, because of the love of God which has been shed in our hearts by His Spirit (Romans 5:5). We rejoice in the Lord, and in the strength of His might, acknowledging that even in this renewing and regeneration, the work is not ours but His (Philippians 2:13, Ephesians 2:10, 2 Corinthians 4:6-7). We are comforted, despite our Saviour's absence (John 14:18-25), walking in the path of light by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14, 1 John 1:7).

Our bodies become temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), where His Spirit is pleased to dwell (Romans 8:9) and we wait, with patience in this life, for the final redemption of our mortal bodies by that same Spirit at Jesus' return (Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:53, Romans 2:7, 2 Corinthians 5:4).

"None of us has anything which he did not receive. To begin with, God gives to all life and breath, and in Him we live and move and have our being. Then, fallen creatures as we now are, God gives the blessing of His Son to open out the way of life; and He gives His Word to tell of His purpose which culminates in that Son. To follow that, He promises all needful help from above to answer the needs of His servants and strengthen them

on the way of pilgrimage to the Kingdom of His glory. The apostle [Paul] bids disciples offer their bodies a living sacrifice to God that, by His power and blessing, they may be both strengthened to do them and as the essential road to their own salvation, that they may be “transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”, who through Christ their Lord, “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” | Alfred Norris, The Holy Spirit and the Believer Today

This article was first published 28 October 2019

Regeneration + The Holy Spirit

“Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” | 2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV

There can be a tendency to reduce the work of the gospel to simply to a culture of ‘making us nice’. That is to say, that being a Christian equates to a program of basic self-improvement. Yet there are plenty of nice people who aren’t Christians; people who do good things for others without having Jesus in their life. And while Jesus does, of course, make a difference in the lives of believers, it’s more than just ‘making us nice’.

New Not Nice

Jesus didn't come to *improve us* – he came to *save us!*

We were made to [walk with God](#) and dwell in His presence. God, who is the source of all life, made humans in His image and in His likeness, with the potential and capability to be like Him, to reflect His glory throughout the earth.

But the effects of sin entering the world were dramatic and far-reaching. Humanity died that day – not physically or immediately, but spiritually. Our union with God was severed and we became separated from God's presence. And just as we have inherited physical life from our parents, we also inherit spiritual death. Every human who is born comes into the world physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection with God, we are nothing more than 'dead men walking', living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.

And no amount of 'nice' can fix this.

“With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.” | Ephesians 4:17-24, ESV

The Christian life doesn't start with reformation. You cannot reform a dead heart. The Christian life starts with a radical

regeneration. From spiritual death comes a resurrected life, a new nature, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A truly gospel-shaped life is one that begins in death. [Baptism](#), the Bible tells us, is a symbol of the death that Jesus experienced. And by his death, he destroyed the power of sin and death; those things which keep us separated from God and the life He has purposed for us. Through Jesus, it becomes possible for us to be reconciled again to God's good life and His life-giving spirituality. We're told, if we die with Jesus (in baptism), we will also live with him, participants in his resurrection life. That life starts right now, the very moment a believer rises from the waters of baptism.

"That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word."

| Romans 6:3-10, MSG

If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his [life-giving resurrection](#)! Not just as some future hope or aspirational thought but as a reality, right now! Our dead spirituality is reborn, renewed, and regenerated in Jesus. It's into the darkness of spiritual death that God has shone His glorious light of life, the knowledge of the glory of Himself expressed in Jesus.

This is why Paul can so confidently say in his letters to the churches at Colosse and Corinth:

“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory...” | Colossians 3:4, ESV

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” | 2 Corinthians 4:6, KJV

Saved Not Sincere

When we accept [the truth of our situation](#) and choose to do something about it, the Bible doesn't tell us to 'believe and be sincere'. The Bible tells us to believe and [be saved](#). That's not to say that sincerity isn't important. Of course it is. But the emphasis – the first word about the action that takes place – is about the activity of God. It's God who is saving us and it's God who is renewing us. It's God who accepts our belief in the sacrifice of Jesus and sends [His Spirit](#) into our lives to regenerate us as new creatures in His Son.

God graciously gives salvation to those who repent and believe. It is **His** action in our lives that makes the difference. **He** transfers us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His son, **He** adopts us as His children and **the Spirit** himself bears witness to this new identity.

The work of saving is entirely God's and this is why we can confidently preach 'that we are saved by grace through faith alone and not by our works'. [Grace is what saves, faith is the instrument through which it is effected.](#)

This is vitally important because when we believe our faith is

what saves us*, we begin to measure our faith (and others') by the intensity of it (or the lack thereof). We begin to think of faith as a single act, rather than a life of orientation.

“Faith isn't an emotion God evaluates by its intensity. Faith is trust and it's only as good as the object of its trust. So the question isn't, “do you truly believe?” but “who do you believe in?” We must point continually to God in Christ, who is good and generous and amazingly gracious. We trust Him and His grace for our salvation, not the strength of our emotions.” | Michael Lawrence

Faith trusts that this work isn't ours – it's God's and He's doing it for His glory. [He saves not because of who we are but because of who He is.](#) Why? Because He loves us.

“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with every good thing to do His will. And may He accomplish in us what is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” | Hebrews 13:20-21, NIV

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good pleasure.” | Phillipians 2:13, NIV

“And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore you, secure you, strengthen you, and establish you. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.” | 1 Peter 5:10 BSB

Disciples Not Decisions

Our resurrected life is not dominated by decisions that come and go but by faithfully following Jesus. Every Christian's

life starts at a certain point, with a decision, but that one decision alone is not enough to make us a disciple. Resurrection life continues as a life marked by discipleship. Every day, the mission is the same: a commitment to follow Jesus, regardless of the cost.

Having faith does not mean *'being spiritual'* or *'belonging to a faith community'* or *'seeking spiritual direction'*. Of course, it may involve those things but having faith is wholehearted trust that God will keep His promises, and this trust is constantly affirmed and demonstrated by a transformed life.

It's examining ourselves, not just on Sunday, but every day, to see if we are *'in the faith'*.

It's waiting on Jesus.

We must be committed to not just making *'a faithful decision'* on any given day, but to being disciples – life-long followers of Jesus who take up their cross, enduring hardship, because our trust is in Jesus' sacrifice and God's promise to us in this.

But we are not alone in our resurrected life.

"If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." | Romans 8:11, ESV

"...This is my [Paul's] prayer. That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of Him: that you may receive that inner illumination of the Spirit which will make you realise how great is the hope to which He is calling you—the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how tremendous is the power

available to us who believe in God. That power is the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when He raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honour in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.” | Ephesians 1:18-21, JB Phillips

God’s own Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are His children. Our existence is now framed by Christ’s life – who is, himself, a life-giving Spirit.

“The first man was named Adam, and the Scriptures tell us that he was a living person. But Jesus, who may be called the last Adam, is a life-giving spirit.” | 1 Corinthians 15:45, NIV

This resurrected life comes with the promise of help (Ephesians 1:13-14) from the Spirit of God Himself. Jesus tells his disciples that God will send them a *comforter, counsellor, advocate or helper* (παράκλητος (paráklētos) to teach and guide them. The spark of new life that has been lit in their hearts will grow and be sustained by nothing less than the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit; the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” | John 14:15-16, 26, ESV

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise belongs to you and your children and to all who are far off – to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself. With many other words he testified, and he urged them, “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” Those who embraced his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to the believers that day.” | Acts 2:38-41, BSB

“He redeemed us in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” | Galatians 3:14, BSB

Led By The Spirit

Christianity is a relationship, not a [ritual](#) or a religious code of ethics. It's living in [communion](#) with the Father and His Son and being constantly led by the Holy Spirit in our discipleship. It's living in freedom from the power that sin and death formerly had over us.

This freedom is one of the most precious realities of our regenerated life.

In no way does this deny the continuous struggle believers still have with sin, but we can have trust and confidence that we have been transferred out of sin's dominion and into the kingdom of Jesus; that we are a child of God and that, day by day, we are being renewed and transformed into the likeness of His Son.

Not only this, the blood of Jesus is able to cleanse us from all sin. If we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive.

“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and

brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” | Colossians 1:13, NIV

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” | Romans 8:9-11, NIV

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” | 1 Corinthians 3:16 – NIV

We are empowered to live a fully reconciled '[kingdom life](#)', both with God and to each other, brought together as [family and community](#) through the precious blood of our saviour. Together, believers become the church of Christ – his body; fellow citizens with the family and household of God, and a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Our greatest hope and expectation is that Christ, who is our life, will one day appear and change our corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies and we will be forever with our Lord ([Romans 8:11](#), [1 Corinthians 15:53](#), [Romans 2:7](#), [2 Corinthians 5:4](#)).

God always intended to dwell with His people and, through Jesus, this became possible. The Holy Spirit works powerfully in us to change our hearts. Christians are now connected, in a deeply spiritual way, to the source of eternal life for which we were always purposed. Our faith, hope, and love grow more each day in similarity to the One who empowers our life and we begin to look more and more like Him.

The power and truth of the gospel are displayed when people begin to live differently, empowered by God's Spirit. We become a community that can only be explained by a gospel that truly converts and changes lives.

For those of us who may have been out of step with the Spirit, now is the time to open our hearts and our lives to the transforming and regenerating work of the Spirit. Ask, as a child would from a parent, for the gift of the Spirit to come and create in you a new heart.

Now is the season to discover how to walk alongside the Spirit, not expecting God to do all the work, nor trying to do it all ourselves. Being led by the Spirit is following Jesus in faithful discipleship, in partnership with God in His great kingdom mission, fully empowered by His Eternal Spirit.

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" | Luke 11:13, NIV

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." | Romans 15:13, NIV

"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." | Romans 5:5 – NIV

***If faith doesn't save, then why does James make such a big deal about faith and works? When he wrote his letter, James was actually concerned with counterfeit Christianity of another kind – the unauthenticity of a life that is**

'Christian' in name only. James is talking about those who make a 'one-time decision' to 'be a Christian' and yet nothing really changes in their lives. He is tackling a different, yet no less dangerous distortion of the gospel of grace, the idea that believers can 'continue in sin that grace may abound'. That is to say, that nothing about the way the believer behaves or lives after being [saved](#) needs to change, that verbally expressing our faith in Jesus is enough, and that we don't need to 'do better' because God's grace covers all our shortcomings anyway. James is talking about a half-gospel, one that possibly makes us 'feel better about ourselves' but doesn't convert our hearts or demonstrate true [discipleship](#) by a transformed life.

The truth, James says, is that *yes, we are made right with God by believing and professing our faith in His promises. Yet, it cannot be real faith, the faith that counts with God, unless it's demonstrated by an active, loving response to God's grace.* This is, as Paul agrees, "faith working through love." ([Galatians 5:6](#)), demonstrated by a Christian in 'what they do'. This is what discipleship is all about.

You can read more about the Faith | Works Conundrum [here](#) or Discipleship [here](#).

This article was first published 2 March 2020

By One Man

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I like the Apostle Paul.

I like his ability to 'call a spade a spade', the unrelenting pursuit of his faith, and his bold assertion to "preach nothing but the cross of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:2). No doubt he ruffled more than a few feathers at times, with his

unapologetic directness and refusal to tolerate any other gospel than that of being [saved by grace through faith alone](#).

He doesn't shy away from telling it how it was; the reality that his zeal for God had been seriously misplaced early on, and that he had been a violent persecutor and destroyer of the very faith he was now thankful to call his own.

He doesn't downplay the facts of his former life; that not only had he been zealous for the traditions of his fathers, he had also been considered an 'up and coming' amongst his peers, his upward trajectory in Judaism eclipsing many of those his own age (Galatians 1:13).

Yet he also doesn't state this just for effect or from a place of pride, but rather as facts relevant to advancing the true gospel narrative he now endeavors to preach. He states that he counts all those things of his former life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord.

He has a particularly warm and fatherly relationship with Timothy, his 'son in the faith' and he shows deep regard for several fellow workers whom he commends by name: Epaphroditus, husband-and-wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Luke, Lydia, and Onesiphorus.

He demonstrates tenderness and genuine love and concern for all those of the "household of faith" and he is a passionate evangelist to those who are yet still "strangers and foreigners" to the gospel of grace. His letters to the early churches are full of pastoral advice and authoritative direction. Yet he is also unapologetically direct and is prepared to meet and name injustice or falsity head-on, as in the situation that he writes about in 2 Corinthians 7 (see also 2 Corinthians 11, Galatians 1:6–9, Galatians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 11:26).

"Paul's letters reveal a remarkable human being: dedicated, compassionate, emotional, sometimes harsh and angry, clever

and quick-witted, supple in argumentation, and above all possessing a soaring, passionate commitment to God, Jesus Christ, and his own mission.” | [Britannica.Com](https://www.britannica.com)

Paul’s influence, passion, and commitment enabled the gospel of Jesus Christ to take root and flourish throughout Asia Minor, and its spread continued long after his death, reaching even to the ends of the earth.

Paul wrote several letters, one of which was the letter to the church at Rome. In chapters 5 and 6 of Romans, he covers some significant theological territory by dealing with the themes of death, life, and resurrection, which came about, he states, ‘by one man’...

By One: Death In Adam

The need for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God sits at the heart of the gospel. Paul recounts in Romans 5 how humanity found itself in the dismal state of being sinning, dying creatures and why we need forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal.

He makes his first point in Romans 5:12 where he teaches that Sin came into the world *by one man* and that death followed swiftly on Sin’s heels, enslaving all of humanity in a dominion of darkness and, ultimately, separation from God.

The word he uses for ‘man’ is the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos) meaning *human*. We get our English word anthropology from the combining of *ánthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος, “human”) and *lógos* (λόγος, “study”). It’s therefore strictly more accurate to say that *by one human* Sin entered the world and death spread to all.

While Adam becomes the representative of us all, the focus, I think, is not primarily on his gender (as a man) but on his humanity. In fact, scripture elsewhere confirms that Eve was

complicit in sin alongside Adam (Genesis 3:6,12, 1 Timothy 2:14). Together, they were responsible for the catastrophe that unfolded.

“The narratives of Genesis focus on conflict and resolution. God’s purpose from the beginning is to have His presence fill the earth; humans are to image God and subdue the earth, i.e., bring about order and fruitfulness in creation (Genesis 1–2). Conflict enters the story when humans rebel against God (Genesis 3). Shalom is shattered, and the earth is cursed. Further degeneration takes place (Genesis 4–6) until God brings judgment and mercy (Genesis 6–9). Humans then attempt to restore God’s presence (Genesis 11) before God launches His own initiative to re-establish His presence on Earth (the covenant). Genesis 1–11, then, is the founding story of humanity, ending in crisis. These narratives give a real and true assessment of God’s initial purposes and the human plight. Genesis 12–50 is the founding story of the nation with whom the covenant is eventually made at Sinai. The covenant establishes the relationship to Abraham and his descendants, provides the structure for living in God’s presence, and lays the foundation for God’s presence to be established on earth.” | [BioLogos](#)

The consequence of the fall in Eden – mortality – flowed from Adam and Eve to all of humanity; a literal reality and a core theological truth embedded within the Genesis record. Dying became hard-coded in our DNA.

Not only that, Paul comments later in Romans 7, Sin is a powerful and destructive force that humans find impossible to resist. Humanity has been *sold under sin*, constantly battling against the pull of our own self-will, which is invariably in opposition to God. Despite having the desire to do good, more often than not, we lack the ability to do what is right, so powerful is Sin’s hold and influence over us. There is no one in all the world who has not fallen prey to Sin’s insidious,

whispering temptation* (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:21).

The introduction and continued presence of Sin in the world is what gives death its power over humanity. We die because we're mortal and death now reigns supreme and we remain dead because of the power that Sin gives death.

In Adam, all die. This is Paul's first point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.

By One: Life In Christ

Yet, says Paul in Romans 5:21, and here he makes his second point, in Christ, there is life. There is another theological truth embedded within the Genesis record, a promise "that new life would be delivered out of death."

"And I will put enmity (open hostility) Between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise your head, And you shall [only] bruise His heel." | Genesis 3:15, AMP

Humanity was promised that a descendant of Eve – [another human](#) – would arise to wage war against Sin and to overthrow death. Yet in waging this war, death would deal him a powerful blow, a seemingly mortal wound. But out of his death would flow life.

This promise would be affirmed countless times throughout scripture, and, particularly, by Jesus himself during his ministry, who stated the reason for his coming was that "they [humanity] may *have life*, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]" (John 10:10, Amplified Bible).

Unable to wage the war for themselves, God's promise and gift to the world would go into battle on humanity's behalf. He would wage war for all those who were weak, utterly helpless, and hopelessly enslaved to Sin. Those who were living in

darkness, far from the eternal life God had intended for them. Those whose greatest enemy was death itself.

In fact, this hero's redemptive work *on behalf of humanity* would be deeply connected to *his own humanity*. He had to be human, like us, in order to make atonement for the sin of humanity (Isaiah 53:6, Hebrews 2:17)

As a human, he would still feel keenly the pull of Sin's seductive promise, the desire and temptation, as *the first Adam* had, to undertake this battle on his own terms. He would wrestle with the terrifying but necessary reality of confronting death up close; not just any kind of death but the painful and humiliating death of a traitor.

He would face the world's great enemy alone, rejected by all, even by those who were closest to him, in the moment of his greatest need. Defenseless, *like a lamb led to slaughter*, he would cling to the words of the Psalmist that, though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, God would be with him still. He would choose to suffer according to God's will, committing his soul to a faithful Creator.

This war would be brutal and bloody and seemingly fatal for our hero.

And yet, there would be an extraordinary twist...

Where *the first Adam* had been a living being; *the last Adam* would be a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). This hero would be human *but not merely a human*. He would be the "Word-Made-Flesh" – the 'one and only of his kind' and in him would dwell 'the entire fullness (completeness) of God's nature (Colossians 2:9).

Written into the very fabric of our reality was a powerful promise that Sin *could be* defeated by the willing sacrifice of one who had committed no sin and who had lived a perfect, moral life according to God's will. The sacrificial death of

such an individual, on behalf of all of humanity, would heal the division between God and humanity, reopening the way to the eternal life God had always intended for His creation.

Scripture could not be any clearer that the victory over Sin and death was going to be God's, accomplished through the sending of His Son, the Word-Made-Flesh. Sent in the likeness of all of humanity, but in whom dwelt all the fullness of God, only the Son of God would be able to overcome and defeat our greatest enemy.

Not only that, in meeting death head-on, he would deal it a fatal blow, overturning and destroying its claim on him. Sin's power to command death would be vanquished. Jesus himself would now hold the keys of death and the grave. On the third day, at the break of dawn, he would rise from the silence, *Life* himself having swallowed up death in victory (Acts 2:24, Romans 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:54).

One act of righteousness, Paul says, led to justification and life for all humanity. By one man's obedience, many would be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

"As sin has exercised kingly sway in inflicting death, so grace, too, may exercise kingly sway in bestowing a righteousness which results in the Life of the Ages through Jesus Christ our Lord." | Romans 5:21, Weymouth New Testament

Deeper Magic

I love how C S Lewis writes about this epic moment in his fictional work, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*:

At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate...The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan. "Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean?"

Is it more magic?" "Yes!" said a great voice from behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself. "Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad... "But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer. "It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward." | C S Lewis

This "deeper magic" is an immutable law of consequence, as certain as the law of gravity or the rising of the sun. Jesus has brought life and all those *in him* will live. This gift of grace has been given, the work has been finished and the end has been written. *"While we were still enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and, further, now that we are reconciled, we will also be saved by his life."*

In Christ, all will live. This is Paul's second point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.

The Resurrection: Proof + Promise

One of the great theological truths of the Christian faith, as taught by Paul and, indeed, written into the earliest Christian creeds is the necessary and factual reality of [the resurrection](#), particularly, the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, Paul asserts that resurrection underpins the entire gospel narrative, without which all of Christian life is rendered futile.

*“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even **Christ has been raised**. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.” | 1 Corinthians 15:17, NIV*

He actually summarised the gospel by affirming three statements, one of which is a declaration of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus:

“Remember Jesus Christ [the anointed], raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.” | 2 Timothy 2:8 | NIV

The Christian faith asserts and teaches that resurrection is a historical reality; Jesus Christ really did live, die, and was raised again to eternal life.

The resurrection is not only relevant to the gospel narrative, it's essential. Author Craig Blomberg comments, *“As wonderful as Jesus' life and teachings and miracles were, they were meaningless if it were not historically factual that Christ died and was raised from the dead and that this provided atonement, or forgiveness, of the sins of humanity.”* Embedded in this reality is the proof that what was begun in Jesus, God intends to do for all creation.

“The most startling characteristic of the first Christian preaching is its emphasis on the resurrection. The first preachers were sure that Christ had risen, and sure, in consequence, that believers would in due course rise also. This set them off from all the other teachers of the ancient world...Nothing is more characteristic of even the best thought of the day than its hopelessness in the face of death. Clearly, the resurrection is of the very first importance for the Christian faith” – The New Bible Dictionary 1996, p.

1010, "Resurrection".

Jesus didn't just overcome death, his death also made reparation for all the sins of the world. Sin, in its entirety, was dealt with, once and for always** (Romans 6:10). His resurrection was both proof and promise that the war against Sin had been waged and won. Death has lost its power. Those in Christ *will live*, no longer be held by death but merely passing through it. They too, like him, will be raised to life, never again to experience death.

"I assure you: Anyone who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life." | John 5:24

Life, and *life abundantly* – the same life that Jesus now has [awaits them on the other side](#).

It's no wonder Paul concludes his thoughts on this subject with these inspiring words: *"In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! (Romans 8:7-39, CEV).*

This is indeed good, good news!

***apart from Jesus, of course.**

****This, of course, doesn't mean that we don't still struggle with sin – this is the challenging reality of the Christian life – but rather that the penalty that sin inflicts, death, has been absolved for those in Christ (Isaiah 53:6, 1 John**

2:2, John 1:29). We eagerly wait, with all of creation, to be completely set free from the bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:22).

A large part of the inspiration for this article came from the worship song 'This My Soul' By The Gray Havens. It's truly worth a listen and captures Paul's sentiments from Romans 5 and 6 perfectly. This song is one of my personal favourites.