

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part eighteen
Sunday, May 23rd, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2103
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE HOLY SPIRIT - THE LIFE INSIDE

1 John 4:13 - "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

When we come to talk about the Christian life, it's important that the terms we use mean the same thing to us as they did in the New Testament. It is easy to use the same words but import foreign meanings to the way they were used in the Scriptures.

David Augsburger sites an example of this in his wonderful little book, ***"Dissident Discipleship."***

"Various studies have listed over a hundred meanings for 'spirituality' and have concluded that it is both one of our fuzziest concepts and one of the most appealing. 'Spirituality' has essentially replaced 'religion' (which is deemed too public), displaced 'faith' (too transcendent), nudged out 'personal religion' (too narrow and specific), and become preferable to 'invisible religion' (too elusive). In popular usage it now refers to a privatized, individualized, non-relational reverence for one's 'unique humanness,' 'universal core,' or 'essential humanity.'

"The word 'spirituality,' when used without a modifier, is a 'glow word' that can be attached to persons, places, and things with a positive effect. It has become comfortingly vague and is usefully vacant, allowing people to insert and then extract meanings virtually at will. 'The quest for the true essential meaning of 'spirituality' is a fool's errand,' Lucy Bergman has concluded after studying the uses of the concept over the last two decades. 'As definitions of spirituality proliferated, these have enabled this one term to do double, indeed triple duty....It is in the self-interest of many persons who like the term to keep it as loosely defined as possible; its meanings keep slipping and it can be relied on to fill gaps vacated by older terms, while at the same time pull in other meanings from other contexts'

"In much contemporary usage, spirituality is a path of self-discovery. It is the secret of releasing and unfolding a deeper, wider, richer, gentler growing self."

I don't know if you've taken note of it, but this kind of vague **"god-talk"** has become very common in the

church. And the media now uses the same lingo as the pew. Oprah is all about **“spirituality.”** Books on **“reaching your spiritual potential”** are written from almost every religious background. All share some of the same basic vocabulary. Talk shows discuss **“spiritual thinking”** and **“getting in tune with the spiritual you inside”**

On top of this, pretty well every entertainer suddenly seems to be **“born again.”** Practicing homosexuals are **“born again.”** Pop stars are **“born again”** and pray before gyrating half naked and half high on stage. And most common of all, people who have no interest and rarely, if ever, darken a church door are proclaimed **“born again.”**

All of this causes great confusion for Christians in their pursuit of truth. Does signing a decision card make one “born again?” Does baptism? What about putting up a hand? Who is saved and who isn't? And how can anybody really know?

I think you can see John gets very close to **ground zero** in today's one verse text. Look at it carefully with me:

1) **JOHN GIVES HIS DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN**

1 John 4:13 - "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of His Spirit."

“By this we know....” And the **“this”** at the **beginning** of the sentence refers to the **“Spirit”** at the **end** of the sentence - **“By this we know....He has given us his Spirit.”** Notice John says nothing here about **my** spirit or **your** spirit. He's not talking about our **inner selves** or **human potential** or some heightened **inward realization**.

The thrust of the verse is in an entirely different direction. John, writing by the Holy Spirit, instantly puts conversion in a class by itself. It comes from **God's** Spirit. There is no **man-made** way to get saved. It is not some inward journey of **self-discovery** or **self-fulfillment**. Churches and evangelists and pastors and parents all try to help people **understand the Word of God** or **respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit**, or point to the unique **saving work of Jesus Christ, God the Son**. But the saving work is **God's**.

So we must make sure we **begin** right in our thinking. In all of this it's very important to refocus on John's single point in this great verse. There is a **highly specific** starting point for the life of God in the human heart. The human agents can't save anybody. And I can't bring myself into a relationship with God by my own effort or moral excellence.

True, there are many **means** provided to help me **grow** as a Christian - Bible study, frequent and consistent church attendance, personal devotional habit, acts of witness and service, etc. But none of these things, nor all of them together, is **organically what makes me a Christian**.

John says a mouthful when he says **only the Holy Spirit births eternal life**. He **gives** it. I **receive** it from Him, on His terms, or I don't receive it at all. I am absolutely helpless to find it on my own.

Even in the evangelical church there is much blurred vision on this point. It may be one of the great misconceptions of the church today. It effects everything. Because if I don't move ahead from this proper starting point in my Christian life I will spin my tires and waste my energy and probably find my whole attempt at living for Jesus difficult and disappointing.

Just as one simple example, take the simple exercise of coming to church regularly. I've learned over the years that people come to church for many reasons. Some come because when they were young their parents took them to church. Those days seemed like happier, simpler times. Then, as they grew into adulthood, they got out of the habit. They miss the hymns. Life has stressed them out. They long for the quieter times of the good old days.

Some people come to church because they have come to the end of their rope in life. Their marriage has come unglued. They've gone bankrupt. Their kids have messed up their lives. They're in trouble with the law. So back they come to church because they hope they'll find some solution to their problems - something to help them cope with life and set them on their feet again.

Some people come to church because they're looking for something that will keep their children and youth morally on track in this perverted world. They like the idea of boys and girls groups, a strong youth program. Truth is, they're more interested in what the church does for their **kids** than what it could do for **them**. Their kids usually discover that and will see through the

phoniness before long.

Some people like the social aspect of the church. All their friends are there. It's refreshing to be with people who don't swear or lie or cheat - at least not publicly. You can mix with a nice bunch of people at church.

Now, there's nothing **wrong** with any of those things. The church **ought** to provide those kinds of ministries and opportunities. But there is something very tragic that can happen right in the middle of that whole process. The person who is there looking for the solution to his or her broken marriage, or the parents hoping to keep their teenager on track, or the person who likes the friends at the church, will sit and hear teaching on all sorts of aspects of Christian living.

He or she will hear sermons on Bible study and the importance of the Word of God and think, "Yes, this is very important. I should read my Bible." Or he will hear some teaching on prayer and think, "Yes, prayer must be very important. All these people seem to pray. I'm going to pray too." Or he will hear sermons on holiness and think, "Yes, my life is far from perfect. I need to clean up my act and start living a holy life."

But he's going to find that none of these things will work for him very well. He tries to be holy but it's all in his own strength. He tries to pray but he feels like he's talking to himself. He tries to study his Bible but he finds it dry, with no spiritual life in it.

What's gone wrong here? I'll tell you what's gone wrong. There are all sorts of people who are trying to apply the mechanics of the Christian life to an **unconverted** heart. And the tragedy is one day they will leave the church thinking the Christian life doesn't work. They thought it was putting a **"What Would Jesus Do?"** bracelet on and trying their best to copy His actions. And that can't be done. Many people **quit** the Christian life without having ever actually **started** it. Either they or their church didn't know any better.

There's such an urgent need to come back to what John is saying in this thirteenth verse. God has to give you His Spirit to bring you into His kingdom.

John is not alone in insisting this:

2 Peter 1:3-4 - "***His divine power*** has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become ***partakers of the divine nature***, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

Do you see what Peter is saying? You and I only have the freedom to ***follow our desires*** (4). And, Peter says, you and I, without the life and power of God, only possess ***fallen, sinful*** desires (4). Becoming a Christian is having your heart sown with ***godly desires***. Yes, true enough, these new desires must grow and be nurtured.

But it is also true that you and I can't ***create*** this inward change on our own. Peter says God's power has ***"granted to us"*** (1:3) the things that ***"pertain to life and godliness...."*** (1:3). ***"Granted"*** is a ***gift*** word. It means these things are ***given*** from the ***outside***. We can't generate them by inward self-muscle. We must actually receive the life and power of God.

Or look at the words of Jesus:

John 3:5-8 - "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Question: Why did Jesus choose the image of ***birth*** to illustrate conversion? Probably because birth isn't something you can ***add on*** to life. It's the ***start*** of life itself. And it's the one part of your physical life you had nothing to do with. Whatever else you have made of your life, great or terrible, you didn't ***accomplish*** your own birth.

This is Jesus' main point. He tells us a ***new kind of life*** is required to enter the kingdom of God. He's saying, "You can't accomplish this. It lies outside the scope of your activity or effort" That which is born of the flesh ***is*** flesh. That which is born of the Spirit ***is*** spirit. This is why it is profoundly true that every person ***needs*** new birth from above. It is the work of the ***Holy Spirit***,

the third person of the Trinity. There is no other way to **start** - to **enter** - to **get in**. Nothing else can get us there. Nothing else can make the change in the soul.

You can't do anything else in the Christian life until you've **started**. And the start comes from God through Jesus Christ.

2) JOHN SAYS YOU KNOW WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD HAS COME INTO YOUR LIFE

1 John 4:13 - "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

Underscore those two words "we know." Probably more than anyone else, Paul delighted to mark out the contrast between a person **without** the Spirit of God and a person **with** the Spirit of God:

Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-10 - "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The main thought of this passage is simple. The change that takes place at the conversion of a life through Christ Jesus is dramatic and massive. The individual was **dead** and is now **alive**. He was **dominated - controlled** by the spirit of Satan himself. Now he is **in** Christ Jesus. He was heading for nothing but the **wrath of God**. Now he is growing in the **good works** ordained by the Lord Himself. Notice, the **good works** don't **cause** the salvation. They're the **evidence** and **fruit** of it.

John's thought in our text is the same. John says we **know** when the Spirit has done that work in our hearts. It's more than religious observance. It's not like **decorations on a Christmas tree**. It's a new life **inside**. It's **organic**. It's a life that has **movement**, a **force** of its own, a **power** that warms and shapes. This life **reaches** the outside, to be sure. James tells us if it doesn't, it isn't real. But it doesn't **start** on the outside. There's nothing **man-made** about it.

One of the great blessings of a long pastorate in the same church is the quiet joy that comes from looking out over a large crowd of faces and pausing over people you didn't think had a chance of walking in newness of life. I came to this church when many young married couples were infants unable to walk.

And new faces have come. They come from all sorts of backgrounds. There are people who had everything against them. There are people who didn't have any Christian influence - nothing but heartache and opposition. There are women who were deserted by their husbands. Children who didn't have Christian parents. And there they are right now - bright new creations by the grace of God!

That's the reality John describes in this verse. He says you can know when the Spirit is present in a life. Conversion is meant to be that drastically powerful and visible.

Oh, I know many of the changes happen over time. And I know transformation can often be slower than we'd like. But the conversion principle is still drastic and immediate. I groan over the sins I once delighted in. There's a different **inward me** who wrestles with the sins I once cherished. There's an inward something pulling me in a new direction. Never settle for less than that.

Next Sunday I want to look at this in more detail. ***How can I know for sure when the Holy Spirit is at work in my life?***