

Holy Spirit and You

Advance in Faith 1 — Unit 3 Week 3 — Life with Holy Spirit



Introduction

Holy Spirit is the one who regenerates us. He introduces us to Jesus our Saviour. He births us into the family, so we are children of God. He assures us we belong in the family, helping us to know our Father.

In this session, we'll look at some of the New Testament letters that describe the life we have through Holy Spirit. There's a huge difference between the life we were born with (our natural life) and the life the Spirit births in us. Our new life in the Spirit is more meaningful and productive. Galatians 5 and Romans 8 will be our key texts.

Alive in the Spirit (Galatians 5)

Holy Spirit changes everything for us. At the cross, Jesus confronted the power of evil. In his resurrection he conquered the power of death. With his ascension, he became the new leader of humanity. Holy Spirit takes what Jesus achieved and makes it reality in us. Until he regenerates us, we are still imprisoned under our old rulers: like dead men walking, we are slaves of evil — a mere zombie existence.

When Holy Spirit regenerates us, Jesus' resurrection life enters into us. We are animated with Jesus' life—his Spirit in us! He entered into our deadness at the cross, so his life enters into us now. To paraphrase **Galatians 2:20**:

In what happened to the Messiah, I recognise my own crucifixion: my deadness, expressed as his death.
 My own life has been quite dead all along.
 And now, in me, the resurrected Messiah lives.
 It's like a transplant: the dead me has been surgically replaced with the life of God's Son.
 He loved me and gave himself up for me.
 It is his faithfulness that I live each day.

The life we were born with is doomed. We truly live only when Holy Spirit transplants Jesus' resurrected life into us and lives in us:

Galatians 3:2 Let me ask you just this: Did you receive the Spirit by observing God's rules or by hearing and trusting him? Don't be daft! The Spirit birthed life in you, so you can't complete it with your old life.

Galatians 3:5 Does the one who gifts you his Spirit and performs miracles through you do so because you've observed his rules, or by hearing and trusting him?

Galatians 3:14 In Messiah Jesus, the blessing God gave Abraham finally comes to the nations, so we can receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Original translation)

Paul believes that Holy Spirit regenerates us with Jesus' life. We receive Holy Spirit through faith—by trusting what Jesus achieved for us in his death and resurrection. The presence of Holy Spirit radically changes our lives: we no longer live life for ourselves; we live Jesus' life in us. That includes miraculous things that we could not do out of our own energy or capacity.

Let's clarify what Paul means when he contrasts *flesh* and *spirit*. Some people misunderstand, as if Paul thought of us as made up of parts—a body (that's bad) and a spirit (that's good). Some people even add a third part, as if we're made up of body, soul, and spirit. That's not what Paul believes, and certainly not what he means by these terms.

What Paul means:

- **flesh** = the life you got from Adam, through your parents (generation). This is your old life.
- **spirit** = the life you got from Jesus, through Holy Spirit (regeneration). This is his life in you.

Thank your parents for your flesh life (the life they gave you).
Thank Holy Spirit for your new life (Jesus' resurrection life in you).

Based on the life we get from our parents (our flesh), we're already in trouble with our heavenly sovereign. We are like the children of rebels who were banished into exile by their sovereign many generations ago. We were born in exile. We grow up as slaves of evil—estranged, unable to get ourselves back home. But the king sent the prince to bring us back home into his kingdom where we belong! He has done everything we need to repatriate us back home! It's the best news! Going back home into the king's domain is a new life for us. So what will we do? Shall we continue to live in the makeshift camp we were born in? Or shall we live as restored citizens, responsive to his reign? Shall we continue to live our old flesh-life expressing our ruined humanity, or shall we live the new life of restored humanity that his Spirit has created in us?

Galatians 5:15-25 asks you to consider whether you are living out of our ruined humanity (flesh) or out of our restored humanity (spirit):

Galatians 5 ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the **Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the **flesh**. ¹⁷ For the **flesh** desires what is contrary to the **Spirit**, and the **Spirit** what is contrary to the **flesh**. ...

Paul goes on to contrast what it's like to live out of our ruined humanity (the works of the flesh) with what it's like to live productively through the Spirit (the fruit of the Spirit).

To paraphrase:

Galatians 5 ¹⁶ I tell you, walk around in your Spirit-life (your restored humanity), and you will not fulfil the cravings of your flesh-life (your ruined humanity).

¹⁷ For our flesh-life craves the opposite of our Spirit-life, and our Spirit-life craves the opposite of our flesh-life: they're in conflict, so we can't achieve what we want.

¹⁸ But if the Spirit-life leads you, you are not restricted by legislation. ¹⁹ Legislation limits the all too obvious expression of what our ruined humanity craves: immoral sex, corrupt cravings, unrestrained appetites, ²⁰ serving things as gods, manipulation, hostility, dividing people to conquer them, fighting for your own interests, throwing tantrums, power games, sowing discord, creating schisms, ²¹ envy, substance abuse, partying to excess, and so on.

I warned you before, and I warn you again: those who live like will never enjoy their inheritance—life under God's reign.

²² Let the Spirit bring to fruition among you the life God intended: a productive life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, restraint. No one passes laws to restrict these things! ²⁴ Those who live under the reign of King Jesus have crucified their flesh-life with its passions and cravings.

²⁵ Since we are alive through the Spirit, give expression to the Spirit's life. ²⁶ That leaves no place for meaningless comparisons: putting each other down, or envying another.

There is a fundamental change of direction between our flesh-life and the Spirit-life. Our corrupted humanity is focused on what it can get. Paul's list—the works of the flesh—was all about cravings, desires, appetites, and gaining power. The Spirit's life is all about contributing to community—giving love, joy, peace and whatever makes life together great. In fact, this is the central change that takes place, the change that indicates someone has been regenerated.

Don't waste your energy fighting your old ruined humanity.

Instead, give expression to your new restored humanity.

Let the Spirit express Jesus' resurrection life in you!

Living in the Spirit (Romans 8)

The difference between the flesh life (our corrupted humanity) and the Spirit life (our restored humanity) is also the theme of Romans 8.

Read Romans 8:1-14 from The Message translation.

Holy Spirit makes us his partner in God's project of regenerating the world through Jesus. There is no life more vitalised than you can know through Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. Romans 8 describes this partnership with Holy Spirit who is regenerating God's creation.

That partnership with Holy Spirit begins with prayer and sustains us through whatever happens in the creation that is still being redeemed.

Read Romans 8:15-17 from The Message.

Life in the Spirit does not mean life without suffering. If it did, Jesus got it wrong. God is in the process of restoring his corrupted creation from the stranglehold of evil and death that currently enslaves it, but that task is not yet complete. When it is complete, the whole creation will once again be where it belongs—under the management of our heavenly sovereign. That's our hope. When that task is complete, it will be obvious to everyone who the king's children are, but right now it is the ones who are ruining creation and holding it enslaved under the power of evil who get all the press (8:18-21).

We don't have our resurrection bodies yet. We have the promise that God will raise and restore everything, and he has already given Holy Spirit to us as the start (firstfruits) of the great harvest to come. We struggle, experiencing the same pain as the rest of the world, but we feel the pain as purposeful. We have this hope of what God will bring to birth in creation when he sets everything right, and that expectation causes us to feel the present pain as labour pains—God bringing his new creation to birth! So, Holy Spirit inspires us to wait patiently for the coming birth—a new creation with the children of God visible (8:22-25).

As we wait for God to complete what he has promised, Holy Spirit helps us in our present struggle. Do you ever feel like you don't even know what to ask for? If God doesn't solve everything now, do we ask him to take away our pain? Do we ask him to fix things now for us? Or do you struggle to know what to pray for? At times, there are no words. Holy Spirit is here, within us, feeling the groans we feel, the groans we can't find words for. He groans within us. For he (she?) is the one giving birth to God's new creation!

The second verse of the Bible describes the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters as God brings creation to birth. Now in the world gone wrong, Holy Spirit enters the groaning of the world, in the

groaning of believers. In his groans, beyond words, God gives birth to new creation—the world restored to what he intended, working productively under his governance as his realm.

Our experience of Holy Spirit begins in prayer. In the presence of our Father, we sit and listen. He groans within us, so we begin to experience the pain of people we know. We present these groans to our heavenly ruler. We are not telling God what to do; we are simply bringing to the attention of our heavenly ruler those things within his kingdom that are not running as they should.

It is in this context—not knowing what to tell God to do, just feeling the groans of Holy Spirit, with confidence that he will bring all that God intended for creation to birth—that we discover the truth of **Romans 8:28**:

We know that for those who love God (recognising him as sovereign over history), everything is working together towards the purpose he has called us to.

Group Questions

1. Discuss what Paul means by the words *flesh* and *spirit* in Galatians 5:16-25. What do these terms mean to you?
2. Discuss the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), in contrast with the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). What motivates the complete reversal of direction from living selfishly to living outwardly?
3. When it comes to prayer, how does Holy Spirit help us? Do you have any experience of the “wordless groans” of Romans 8:26?

Memory Work

Romans 8:26 (NIV)

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.
We do not know what we ought to pray for,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Take Home Exercise

Spend time in prayer, aware of the presence of Holy Spirit. When you run out of words, just sit in silence. Become aware that Holy Spirit shares in the grief of our struggles and the struggles of those around us (and it's not just the struggles of those who attend church). Hear his groans. Let him share his burden for people with you, so you feel it too. Even if you don't know what to ask God to do, share in the anguish until you know that our heavenly Father knows and cares and will ultimately set everything right.

If this is quite different from how you normally pray, it may take some time before it feels familiar. Don't rush it. Wait in his presence. Become aware of Holy Spirit's presence, and Father's long-term purpose of restoring the world as his realm. If you need some words to help with your meditation, Tom Wright's translation of Romans 8:18-25 may help:

¹⁸ This is how I work it out. The sufferings we go through in the present time are not worth putting in the scale alongside the glory that is going to be unveiled for us. ¹⁹ Yes: creation itself is on tiptoe with expectation, eagerly awaiting the moment when God's children will be revealed. ²⁰ Creation, you see, was subjected to pointless futility, not of its own volition, but because of the one who placed it in this subjection, in the hope ²¹ that creation itself would be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified.

²² Let me explain. We know that the entire creation is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time. ²³ Not only so: we too, we who have the first fruits of the spirit's life within us, are groaning within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ We were saved, you see, in hope. But hope isn't hope if you can see it! Who hopes for what they can see? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it eagerly—but also patiently.¹

He adds this comment:

Many people want to serve God, but only in an advisory capacity. They know what to pray *for*, but not whom to pray *to*. But what Paul says is that we don't know what to pray for; and, strangely, in that agnosticism we actually discover who God is. We are called to be the people who know whom to pray to but not, or not necessarily, what to pray *for*.²

Eugene Peterson (*The Message*) translates Romans 8:26–28 this way:

²⁶ Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. ²⁷ He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. ²⁸ That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Holy Spirit is our instructor as we learn to pray in the Spirit.

In preparation for next week, read 1 Corinthians 12–14.

¹ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1: Chapters 1-8* (London: SPCK, 2004), 148.

² N. T. Wright, *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1992), 82.