

The Christian's Secret

Understanding the Spirit-filled life.

By Steven L. Pogue

Have you ever wondered why so many Christians don't act like Christians? Does living the Christian life seem impossible? Let me tell you a secret--it *is* impossible--on our own. Trying to live the Christian life by your own efforts is like a ship on dry land...just doesn't work very well. For the ship to get anywhere, it needs to be resting on the water. And to enjoy the Christian life, one needs to learn on how rest in God. Paul knows this: "For I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power" (Philippians 4:13).



The Christian's secret to a consistent life is for Christ to live His life through us: "I have been crucified with Christ: and I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the real life I now have within this body is a result of my trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

It was during Christ's final evening with His disciples that He told them He would be leaving them, but they would not be left alone: "But the fact of the matter is that it is best for you that I go away, for if I don't, the Comforter won't come. If I do, he will – for I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

You have been given someone to enable you to live the Christian life bravely – the Holy Spirit. He isn't just a guide at the information booth along the heavenly trail: He is the Spirit of Christ – come to live in you.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God, as are the Son and the Father. Much of the confusion surrounding the Holy Spirit occurs when people fail to view Him as a person. He has a personality. He is a divine person with a will and emotions.

The Holy Spirit possesses all the attributes that the Son and the Father have. He is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), immutable (unchanging) and eternal. He is the third person of the trinity.

What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a major part of your Christian life. Let's look at some of His roles and see why He is so important.

The Holy Spirit convicted you of your sin and your need for Christ (John 16:8-11). The Bible explains that without the Holy Spirit's help, people think Christianity is foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those around you may think it's crazy you've made such a commitment to Christ! You don't see it that way at all because the Holy Spirit has revealed the wonder of a life in Christ to you.

The Holy Spirit gave you new life. Flesh gives birth only to flesh, Jesus said. It takes the Holy Spirit to give a spiritual birth (John 3:6). And it is through that Spirit that God's love was poured into your heart (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit also provides an inner witness (an assurance) that you are a Christian (Romans 8:16).

The Holy Spirit is a teacher and enabler. He leads you to the truth of God's Word. He illuminates the Bible so you are able to understand and apply its truth (John 16:13,14). He gives power and spiritual effectiveness in your witnessing (Acts 1:8). He intercedes for you before the Father when you feel like you don't know what or how to pray (Romans 8:26,27).

The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ to enable you to live the Christian life! As Paul wrote, "...the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you" (Romans 8:11). The Christian life is possible only with the power of the Holy Spirit.

You may be thinking, I need the Holy Spirit in my life! If you are a Christian, He is already there: "You are controlled by your new nature if you have the Spirit of God living in you (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit resides in you, but you may not be yielding your life to His direction. He may be a resident – without being president.

Paul distinguished between two types of Christians: the spiritual Christian and the carnal Christian.

1. The Spiritual Christian "The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment..." (1 Corinthians 2:15).

The spiritual person has accepted Christ and lives a Christ-centered life. He is not sinless and he faces problems and temptations every day, just like everyone else. But as a way of life, he trusts Christ with each detail and problem that comes along. His greatest desire is to please Christ, and he doesn't rely on the approval of others.

2. The Carnal Christian "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Carnal means "fleshly." The carnal Christian is a Christian (he has committed his life to Jesus Christ at some point), but his life is oriented around himself and his needs. He may show some evidence of being a Christian, but the work of the Holy Spirit is suppressed either through conscious disobedience or ignorance of the Spirit's ministry.

What distinguishes the carnal Christian from the spiritual Christian? It isn't that the carnal Christian lacks part of Christ or the Holy Spirit – he possesses the same

spiritual resources as the spiritual Christian. But the spiritual man relies on Christ's power to live his Christian life while the carnal man relies on his own power. Trying to live the Christian life on your own efforts is as futile as trying to get around town by pushing your car.

Being Led by the Spirit

The Bible talks about being "led" by the Spirit. That implies we obey what He says: He leads, we follow. Simple enough. But usually we don't like anyone telling us what to do – even if it's God! Yet the filling of the Holy Spirit means allowing the Spirit of God and the Word of God tell us what to do.



We have the choice each day: Will we let the Holy Spirit lead us, or will we be controlled by something else? Will fear about the future, or our desire to get what we want, become more important than obeying Christ? When the Holy Spirit fills you, He controls your thoughts and your actions. You can't be filled with hatred, fear or worry while you are filled with the Spirit. There isn't room.

"Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to find out and do whatever the Lord wants you to. Don't drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit, and controlled by Him." (Ephesians 5:17). Unlike alcohol, the changes the Holy Spirit produces aren't artificial. They don't wear off with time. The Bible calls these lasting changes the fruit that is produced from a Christ-centered life: "But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; and here there is no conflict with Jewish laws" (Galatians 5:22,23).

How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

The control of the Holy Spirit is our choice. It's voluntary, but it's not by osmosis. People don't become drunk by handling unopened cases of beer or working in a liquor store. It's after drinking the liquor that things suddenly get fuzzy. As a Christian you can be surrounded by Bibles and Christians without being filled with the Holy Spirit. Or you can be alone, but Spirit-filled.

You can express your desire to follow the Holy Spirit's control through prayer. Here is a prayer that has often been helpful to me:

"Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have been directing my own life and that, as a result, I have sinned against You. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now invite Christ to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You commanded me to be filled, and as You promised in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. I pray this in the name of Jesus. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit."¹

If you prayed that prayer, desiring the Spirit's control, then the Holy Spirit fills you now—even if you don't feel like it. Remember when you committed your life to Christ? You may have had a very emotional experience, or you may have been like me—I felt nothing unusual after accepting Christ. Christ came in not because of a feeling, but because God's Word is true. It's the same with the filling of the Spirit.



Some people equate the filling of the Holy Spirit with a mystical religious experience. It's not mystical. It is a decision of faith: a response to what God says in His Word. Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't dependent upon the feelings you receive, but upon the Bible you believe.

Three Questions

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is so vital to our Christian life! There may be several questions that remain unanswered in your mind.

1. Why aren't more Christians filled with the Spirit?

That was really Mike's question that day we lunched together. What is the reason more Christians aren't filled with the Holy Spirit?

In a word, sin. We choose to disobey God. This can take the form of pride: wanting things our way. We don't give God control of our finances; we've worked hard for our money and it's ours now. We don't give God control of our relationships; why forgive that person when it's really their fault? We don't give God control of our personal morality; that's nobody's business but our own—not even God's. That's pride talking. Scripture says, "He [God] mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34).

Sin can take another form: fear. Proverbs states, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare..." (Proverbs 29:25). Is there something that God wants you to do, but you haven't done it because you're afraid of what people will think? I know it's easy for me to think: I can't do that. I would look foolish if I did that. God can't possibly want me to do that. But often He does!

The last half of that verse in Proverbs teaches: "but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." It's easy to put the approval of people above the approval of God, but isn't pleasing God what we really want? Our lives will be different than other people. But it's worth it.

2. Can I be filled with the Spirit and still struggle with sin?

I guess that depends on what you mean by "struggling with sin"! If you are consistently giving in to sin, then the Holy Spirit can't be controlling or filling your life. But if you are asking, "Will I still commit sin after learning about the filling of the Holy Spirit?"—the answer is an emphatic yes.

You may find yourself committing sin and confessing it several times throughout the day. That's not spiritual weakness; it is evidence that you're living and breathing

spiritually! Becoming aware of sin and dealing with it has been described as “spiritual breathing.”

Spiritual breathing involves “exhaling”—admitting your sin to the Lord as it occurs. You recognize that you have sinned and usurped the Lord’s place as head of your life. By “exhaling,” you are removing the impure, and you are claiming the forgiveness that is yours through Christ’s death on the cross.

Spiritual breathing also includes “inhaling”—asking God to again fill you with His Holy Spirit, to again be the head of your life. Remember that He doesn’t leave you when you sin. But you have ignored His leading, and now you are once again following His direction. You are learning to trust Him, which takes time. Don’t become discouraged when you fall into sin: Learn to get back up.

The youngest of our three children learned how to walk this past year. It took a while. She didn’t wake up on her first birthday, vault over the rails of her crib and jog to toddler aerobics class. Her first steps were tentative and wobbly. She fell into mud puddles, coffee tables and laundry baskets. But she never gave up. Eventually her steps turned into stronger, confident ones. She still falls down at times (and so do her parents!), but she gets back up.



We never become immune to sin; sinlessness is reserved for heaven. As we grow to know God better, we will grow in seeing life from His perspective, and in some areas sin less. We will also learn to battle temptation. But even then there will be occasions when we sin and need to breathe spiritually, whether we’re in the first year of our Christian life or in our seventieth.

3. What if my life hasn’t changed much yet?

Has it occurred to you that your level of spiritual growth may be exactly where God wants it? We’ve looked at two types of Christians, the carnal and the spiritual. But there is a third category of Christian: the new Christian. Remember what Paul told those Corinthians? “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ.”

Several years earlier, Paul had led many of those Corinthian believers to Christ. At that time he didn’t expect them to be mature, spiritual believers. But instead of following a normal growth pattern of spiritual maturity for a Christian, the believers at Corinth became carnal. If you’ve only been a believer for a few months, you’re still a “baby” Christian—not carnal, just young.

Each September when we lived in the Midwest our family would head for Stover’s Orchards in Three Rivers, Michigan. We knew we would be greeted by nearly labeled rows of apple trees. We filled bushel baskets with Mackintoshes, Winesaps and Romes.

Near the back of the orchard were rows of trees that were not laden with apples. In fact, they had no fruit at all. But they weren’t dead; they were just young. Some had not yet reached five feet in height. While the older trees had matured and were bent over with apples, these young trees were just busy growing.

If you are obeying Christ today and trusting His power to change you, then you are exactly where God wants you to be. Don't agonize over the "fruit" you feel you lack. I never saw one of those young trees ever comparing itself with the older ones. Growth is a process, and each part of the process is vital.

I find that as I obey Christ and don't worry about comparing myself to other Christians, I enjoy being a Christian.

¹A prayer taken from Bill Bright, "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-filled Life?" (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1966), p. 12.

*This article is an excerpt from Steven L. Pogue's book, **The First Year of Your Christian Life**. If you would like to purchase a copy of this book, you may do so here: www.campuscrusade.com/books.*