

Introduction

Years ago when I was on staff at Calvary Church and preparing to launch New City, my wife was asked to write the women’s Bible study on the Gospel of John. As part of this she had to speak at the Monday night women’s Bible study to introduce the study—with hundreds in attendance. That alone made her nervous as she hates public speaking.

I remember her talking to me about it, wondering what she should say about John and what she should leave out. I’ll never forget our daughter Grayce’s response when she heard her mother ask what to say about John. She was just six or seven at the time but she was adamant: her mother should not talk about *John* but about *Jesus* because the Bible is about *Jesus* not *John*. She was saying, in her limited vocabulary and understanding, Jesus is the only thing worth talking about to that group of ladies.

We all recognize the three answers any kid needs to get a Sunday School question right: God, Jesus, or the Bible. Whether Grayce had some special insight into the theological center of the universe or she was just reiterating the pat Sunday School answer, she was right. This morning as we look at what it means to be lower-case c charismatic and not capital C Charismatic, this answer is just as true and right for this topic as it was for a Bible study in the Gospel of John.

We are...

catholic, not Catholic
reformed, not Reformed
baptist, not Baptist
presbyterian, not Presbyterian
orthodox, not Orthodox
charismatic, not Charismatic
Christian, not christian

To be charismatic is to live according to the Spirit, and to live according to the Spirit, while seen in spiritual gifts, is seen in a far greater way through our everyday and very ordinary lives. We’re in Romans 8 this morning.

^{Rom 8:1} There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on

the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ 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.

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:1–17

The Realm of Flesh versus the Realm of the Spirit

Paul begins this chapter with a remarkable declaration of the gospel of Jesus: there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. None. To be in Christ is to be free of condemnation! This means there are no barriers between God and his people, for the Lord Jesus has reconciled us to God. He has come to do what we could not do and the result of *his* work is God delights in us. Salvation is not merely the absence of condemnation but the presence of something far greater. As the prophet Zephaniah wrote,

Zeph 3:17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord is in our midst, rejoicing over us and exulting over us with loud singing. Here's why this is good news: you did not cause this. I did not cause this. This is the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, reconciling us to the Father. It is because of what Jesus did that we are not under condemnation. Because we did not cause it, we cannot undo it.

This is what it means to be *in Christ*. Paul goes on to explain more of what it means to be in Christ. He says in verse 2 the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death. What is this law? He means the law of Moses. The law of Moses only resulted in sin and death. This is why he says in verse 3 God has done what the law could not do, for the law was weakened by the flesh.

God wants to save his people and if he wants something done right, he has to do it himself. The reason he has to do it himself is the law of Moses was weakened by “the flesh”—the sinful part of men and women. We’ve seen numerous times the covenant at Sinai had a fundamental problem: it could not bring about the change necessary for God’s people to be like him. The law given at Sinai boils down to this: be like the God of Israel, and this is what he’s like.

The law was not given to be a list of rules, but was God’s self-description. God is the sort to remain pure, so Israel must be pure. God is the sort who is generous to the poor and to the foreigner, so Israel must be generous to the poor and to the foreigner. God is the sort who pursues justice, so Israel must pursue justice. The problem was the law couldn’t *cause* Israel to be like God. The command came without the power to obey. Paul says God chose to do it himself.

He says in verse 3 he sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and so condemned sin in the flesh. Verse 4: in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled *in us*, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. The law required that God’s people be like him. This is the righteous requirement of the law, the very requirement they could not keep! God sent his Son who kept the righteous requirement while being both fully God and fully human, for the law required *humans* to be like God.

Notice he says God’s actions in Christ were so that the law’s requirement would be fulfilled *in us*. God himself did what he requires we do, and applies that obedience to us, as if we had done it. This is what it means to be *in Christ*. Those who are in Christ, he says, do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The new covenant promise is the Spirit will write his law on our hearts and minds. That is, he will transform us from the inside out. We are granted the righteousness of Christ and then the Spirit works out that righteousness in us, making us righteous. This is the realm of the Spirit, and those who are in the realm of the Spirit are no longer in the realm of the flesh.

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh while those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. The flesh is death. The Spirit is life. I love how the Didache puts it:

Did. 1:1 There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.

Didache 1:1

The Spirit of God causes those who trust in Jesus to live in the realm of the Spirit whereas the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God and cannot submit to God’s self-revelation. This is why he says in verse 8 those who remain in the flesh cannot please God.

The Spirit of God Indwells You

In verse 9 he makes a strong declaration: you, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. It’s a strong statement. The translation “if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” seems to soften the strength of the declaration but that’s due to the difficulty of translation. The

word carries the idea of *since*, which is how Paul uses the word earlier in this letter. He says, strongly, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit *since* the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Notice the connection Paul makes between the indwelling Holy Spirit and belonging to Christ. He says anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. In the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples he will send the Spirit of God to them. He calls the Spirit *another* Helper, indicating he is the first Helper. Then he says this:

Jn 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:18

Because God is Triune, one God in three Persons, when the Spirit comes to dwell among his people, Christ is there. This is why Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. As we saw last week the Spirit is God but is neither the Father nor the Son. Each Person who is God is distinct yet there is only one God.

Paul says if a person does not have the Spirit, that person does not belong to Christ. Here we see an important truth: the sign of the new covenant is the presence and activity of God's Spirit. The sign that a person belongs to Christ isn't baptism. It isn't church membership. It isn't volunteering and serving. It isn't putting money in the plate. The sign that indicates one is a follower of Jesus is the Spirit of God is present and active in that person.

What is this activity? If Christ is in you, Paul says, even though your body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. The activity of the Spirit is bringing life out of death. The earthly body is decaying while we await resurrection. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will raise us from the dead. One day you and I will have immortal bodies, free of death and decay, free of illness and disease. *Even more*, we will have bodies *free of sin*.

Paul says this makes us debtors—but not to sin. The Spirit dwells in us and frees us from the grip of sin, but Paul doesn't imply that we will be free from sin in this life. Rather, we are no longer under the all-consuming grip of sin. We are free to not sin. We have the Spirit alive in us who empowers us to live for Jesus. This is our debt, our proper response to the Spirit's presence and activity in our lives. God has freed us from sin and has drawn us to himself.

The way in which we live in this freedom from sin is in verse 13. If we live according to the flesh the result is death. If we put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit we will live. Through faith in God the Spirit is actively causing us to put to death the deeds of the body—the flesh. Through faith we receive a new identity.

In verse 14 he says that all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. In the ancient world "sons" meant "heirs". Daughters received an inheritance through their husbands. Sons received an inheritance from their fathers. We—male and female—are *sons* of God for we are heirs of God. We have been adopted into the family of God, and because we are his sons, we are his heirs—and fellow heirs with Jesus.

We are heirs with Jesus. This means we bear his identity as our own. We are a new creation in Christ, and through faith in Christ God grants us a new identity that is rooted in who he is and what he has done. This is why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. You are not who you once were. You are not the person who did that one thing

or lived that particular life or acted in that certain way. You have been changed. You have been transformed. You are a new creation. This is because God did what we would not and could not do and he did this by sending his Son. His Son's faithfulness is *our* faithfulness. His Son's righteousness is *our* righteousness.

charismatic, not Charismatic

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Spirit is ever at work, causing us to live out our true identity in Christ. Who we were is fading away; who we are is coming in its fullness. When the Lord Jesus lived faithfully as a human, he was being truly human, for true humanity is found in bearing the image of God—showing the world what God is like. Only the Lord Jesus truly did this, which means he is the truest meaning of humanity. The Spirit is working in us to make *us* truly human.

This is why New City is charismatic—lower-case c charismatic. We are filled with God's grace through his Spirit. A *χάρισμα* is a gift graciously given by God. It is God's divine empowerment of his people for living. As the Spirit is working in us to change us, he is also working *through* us to change us and to change others. This is why it is important for us to use our spiritual gifts—our *χαρίσματα*.

We believe God has given each and every follower of Jesus his Spirit and has empowered each one with a particular *χάρισμα*—a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are his divine enablement to do often ordinary things but in extraordinary ways. Some are miraculous. The gift of miracles, for example, is miraculous. Most spiritual gifts look rather ordinary, however. As we saw this past summer, Peter groups all gifts into two broad categories: serving gifts and speaking gifts. Most of the time these activities look very ordinary, yet they empowered by the Spirit of God. Even when we cannot see how he is working in and through us, he is.

It's important to note each one of us who is a follower of Jesus is empowered with *χαρίσματα*. This means we are each *charismatic*—lower-case c. The reason we are not capital C Charismatic is because we reject the idea that any particular spiritual gift is evidence of the Spirit or that the Holy Spirit comes upon us some time after conversion.

There are those who claim that sometime after conversion one experiences “the baptism of the Spirit”. There is not a formal group that oversees the title capital C Charismatic so I'll quote from the “Doctrinal Commitments” of one large denomination that is capital C Charismatic:

We believe in speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and [we believe] that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost.

In other words, *everyone* who has the Spirit will speak in tongues. As evidence of this they cite Matthew 3 wherein Jesus said John baptized with water but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. They further cite John 15:26.

Jn 15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 15:26

Notice that Jesus doesn't mention speaking in tongues here but bearing witness to Jesus. They cite Acts 2 where the apostles initially spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost but Luke doesn't say anything about this being the normal experience of followers of Jesus. They cite some other examples in Acts but none of these is prescriptive, meaning, none of these texts indicates this is supposed to be the normal Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. I don't want to belabor the point and I certainly don't want to disparage brothers and sisters in Christ, so let me just quote Paul where he spoke of this baptism of the Spirit.

^{1 Cor 12:13} For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

Paul refers to all the believers in Corinth as having been baptized in the Spirit: they had each received the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost Peter closely connected faith and repentance with receiving the Spirit:

^{Acts 2:38} And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized 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.

Acts 2:38

Further, after reminding the Corinthians they had all been baptized in the Spirit, Paul stresses that not all believers have the same *χαρίσματα*.

^{1 Cor 12:27} Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

1 Corinthians 12:27–30

These questions are rhetorical; the expected answer to *each one* is "No". Not all have the gift of administration, so why should all have the gift of tongues? When I say we are not capital C Charismatic, this is what I mean. We believe the Spirit is given when one repents and believes in Jesus. Whether that person is immediately aware of it or not, that person immediately receives a spiritual gift, which *may* be the gift of tongues, though more likely it will be the gift of service or the gift of teaching or the gift of encouragement or the gift of mercy, otherwise the overwhelming majority of church history makes no sense.

If we were to pursue a singular spiritual gift as the pinnacle of Christian living, we would be missing out on so much, namely, the rest of the gifts of the Spirit! If speaking in tongues were the highest indicator one has the Spirit of God, where would the gift of encouragement be? Where would the gift of mercy be? Where would the gift of administration be? Where would the gift of healing be? If we elevate a single gift above the others, we necessarily lower the value of all other gifts.

We are lower-case c charismatic because we believe the Spirit of God is free to give whatever gifts he chooses to whomever he chooses, and to whatever degree he chooses. Paul wrote earlier in this same chapter in 1 Corinthians.

¹ Cor 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 12:4–11

Not every believer receives the same gift and those who receive the same gift do not receive it to the same degree. A gifted encourager may well be more gifted to encourage than another gifted encourager and a gifted administrator may well be less gifted at administration than another with the gift. Whatever the gift is, and to whatever degree it is given, it is a manifestation of the Spirit's presence and activity in the life of the believer, for the Spirit's presence and activity is the sign of the new covenant, the thing that indicates one belongs to Jesus.

The Spiritual Life

To be charismatic is to live a Spirit-empowered life. For many capital C Charismatics, the Spirit-empowered life is focused on the exercise of spiritual gifts. The Spirit-empowered life will certainly be demonstrated through spiritual gifts, but that is not the emphasis Scripture places on Spirit-empowered living. A truly charismatic life, or a life empowered by the Spirit, is a life that begins to look more and more like Jesus.

This Spirit-empowered life begins when a person first trusts in Jesus. God in Christ through his Spirit saves a person and removes condemnation altogether, and through that person's faith in Christ, God delights in him or her, and adopts that person as his own child. This new child of God is given the Spirit of God who dwells within that person in fulfillment of the new covenant promise of writing God's law on his or her heart. This law, written on that person's mind, begins transforming that person from the inside out. Thus God did what that person could not and would not do.

Over time the righteous requirement of the law of Moses begins to be fulfilled in that person, for he or she becomes more and more like Jesus. Such a person no longer lives according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. It is because God's Spirit dwells in that person that he or she is no longer in the flesh. The Spirit's ongoing work in that person is bringing life out of death, a continual raising from the dead that will culminate in his or her bodily resurrection on the day of Jesus.

All of this, of course, is rooted entirely in the work of God in Christ through his Spirit. He has claimed us as his own, adopting us into his family. Our spirits cry out, "Abba! Father!" In response, Paul says in verse 16 the Spirit of God agrees with our cry and affirms in us that God is our Father.

The Spirit continues to cause us to obey the Lord by giving us the mind of the Spirit, by desiring the things the Spirit desires, and by rejecting the mind of the flesh and the things the flesh desires. You can tell whether you are living according to the flesh or according to the Spirit by examining the fruit. If the Spirit of God is in you, then you will be growing in the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That last one is particularly important as all of the works of the flesh can be summed up in a *lack* of self-control.

If you are giving in to your flesh and pursuing the things of the flesh, you have no self-control. Your mind is set on the flesh. You live according to the flesh. If you are in Christ, the Spirit of God is driving this out of you by changing you, by causing you to desire the things of the Spirit more than you desire the things of the flesh.

Listen: rarely does God take away our sinful desires. He can. There are many stories of God saving a person and that person losing all temptation for the thing that once enslaved him, whether drugs or alcohol or any number of things. For every sudden rescue like this, however, there are countless brothers and sisters in Christ who still struggle with pride or envy or laziness or same-sex attraction or anger or greed. God *can* take away the temptation, but this is rather rare.

Instead, what the Spirit does is change the person's desires, and by that I mean the Spirit of God gives a believer an ever-increasing desire for the things of the Lord. This ever-increasing desire exists alongside the sinful desires. Rather than eliminate sinful desires in this life, the Spirit of God gives us, as Thomas Chalmers put it, the *expulsive power of a new affection* for the Lord. This affection is *expulsive*; it expels. It pushes out. We don't remove the desires for sin from ourselves; we desire the Lord and his glory more and more. If we desire the things of the Lord more than the things of the flesh, this greater affection will drive out the old desires.

Look, I love a good salad, with lots of crunchy things in it and the right balance of a perfect bleu cheese dressing, which means more bleu cheese than salad. If you offered me a perfectly cooked ribeye, and as we all know, a perfectly cooked ribeye is a medium rare ribeye, I will choose the ribeye every single time. The ribeye doesn't eliminate my desire for a good salad; it exists alongside my desire for salad. My desire for ribeyes, however, is *greater* than my desire for salad. This is what Chalmers means by an "expulsive power of a new affection". Our desire for the Lord grows until it becomes greater than our desire for sin, and it is this *greater desire* that drives out our desire for sin.

I'm reminded of the answer to the trick question Justin Taylor wrote about a couple years ago: how do you get all the air out of a glass jar in a laboratory? With all the latest equipment in the world, what is the most effective way to ensure all the air is removed from a glass beaker? It's simple: you fill it with water. The water drives out the air. You can try to pull out all the air, but as soon as you release the vacuum, the air will rush right back in to the beaker. You need something that replaces the air.

This is what the expulsive power of a new affection does. As the Spirit works in us, the Spirit is filling us more and more with Jesus and it is this filling with Jesus that drives out the desires of the flesh.

This is the Spirit-empowered life. This is the *charismatic* life. The Spirit works in us to change us to make us more like Jesus. Like the new song we sing, every day the Spirit makes us more like Jesus, every day a little more like Jesus. *But how?* Look at Paul's second letter

to the Corinthians.

^{2 Cor 3:17} Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17–18

As we saw last week, we are orthodox, and the orthodox faith is Trinitarian. We believe in one God who eternally exists in three Persons yet remains one God. This Trinitarian faith is rooted in the gospel of Jesus. The Spirit of God points us to Jesus. The Spirit of God works to make us more like Jesus, every day a little more like Jesus.