

## Part V

### The Foundation of a New Human Nature

A challenge for Christians is the ongoing surrender of our will to the rule of God. No matter how long we've been a Christian or how sanctified we think ourselves to be, there is something within each of us that doesn't like to be told what to do.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve simply moved with God. He defined "good," and *doing* good came naturally to them. However, in their rebellion they chose to have the power and the right to decide for themselves what was good. We will always have that power, but a key to our spiritual victory lies in our surrendering that right by becoming a bondservant to God and again doing things His way.

The Christian church in America has promoted the meaning of "salvation," that is, being saved from the penalty of our sins by receiving God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus. However, we carefully avoid the Biblical meaning of being born again and receiving a new nature which is "bent" toward God.

Part V	The Foundation of A New Human Nature	24
15	A New Nature	25
16	Transformed Into the Image of Christ	26
17	Filled With the Spirit	28
18	A New Identity	30
19	A New View of Blessing	31

## 15) A New Nature

Adam and Eve's very nature changed when they rebelled against God. When they usurped His place of rule in their lives they unwittingly gave it to Satan and became naturally inclined toward evil (effective either at birth or at the age of accountability, lets not argue the point) in the way they were previously inclined toward good.

Jesus came to earth not only to forgive our sins, but to break our bondage to Satan and give us a new human nature. When we are truly born again, we receive a new "inner person" which is disposed toward good.

However, **the church has not done well** at teaching us what it means to be born again. It has often been understood as confessing our sins so that God doesn't hold them against us and send us to hell. After we're "saved" we're supposed to be good enough to stay in God's favor. There is little sense among Christians of a radical transformation from the inside out and of becoming a new person with the attitudes, affections and loyalties which express the new nature.

There are many things that Christians do; many places that we go; and many things that we set our eyes upon, that we know deep down inside are not godly – yet we retain for ourselves the right to declare them acceptable for us. *That* is what keeps us in defeat because retaining for ourselves the right to choose, instead of simply doing it God's way, is the chief characteristic and empowering feature of the old nature. It is a battle of wills between us and God similar to what we see expressed between a parent and child. It is the Cosmic Battle being played out in the heart of the individual.

**The deepest level of repentance** is not in turning from certain bad attitudes, habits or actions, no matter how evil they are. It is to turn from retaining the right to determine for ourselves what is acceptable and what is not. *That* is brokenness, i.e. acknowledging how destitute we are in ourselves and how unable to live godly and to experience true life by our own decision about good and evil. We surrender to God; our stubborn will is broken; and the life of God flows into and through us. It's the Psalm 51:17 principle: *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.* (NLT)

Until we give up that right and humbly bow before God, the old nature will continue to unduly influence us. That act is essential to truly being born again versus merely confessing our sins. It is something that we do repeatedly as we grow deeper and deeper in our walk with God.

Submitting to God is not only our entry point into the Kingdom of God, it is crucial to our ongoing victory. As James 4:7 says: *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Don't we often try to resist the devil without first submitting to God?

## 16) Transformed Into the Image of Christ

“Born again” is a graphic depiction of what actually happens. We are truly born, again, but this birth is in the spiritual sense. ([John 3:3-8](#)) We come into the Kingdom of God as a spiritual infant, just as a newborn baby comes into the world physically. We must be cared for, nurtured, and taught – and we must learn obedience. There is an expectation that we will mature spiritually, as we do physically and emotionally.

Titus 3:5b combines the new birth (a moment, an event) and renewal (a process): *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* The Greek word translated “renewal,” means “renovated.” Think about *that!* We are redeemed, or saved, not only from our sins which would have sent us to hell, but from the broken life which our old nature produced. We are now being renovated so that we express the wholeness of the new nature. Incredible!

We must learn to hear and respond to our new inner-man instead of following the patterns and habits of the old. There is a life-long process of “being transformed,” which Paul speaks of in II Corinthians 3:18: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* Note the key word “being,” there, and the sense of progression into the new life.

The word “transformed” comes from the Greek “metamorphosis,” which is the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It involves “a complete change of form, substance and structure,” and it takes time. For us, it continues from the moment we are born again until we take our first breath in heaven.

We must retrain our conscience so that it communicates God’s standards to us; and reshape our God-given, emotional and physical appetites, similarly to the process of children learning to enjoy vegetables after have been addicted to candy.

We must renew our mind, as Paul says in Romans 12:1, 2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Again, “transformed” is “metamorphosis,” and “renewing” means “being renovated.” They are a dynamic duo which operates in concert!

We must deal with **our idiotic notion** that sin is more satisfying than godliness. (Please *think*, before you react to that statement! Honestly, don’t we often think that being altogether “Christian” would be boring and dull? How ready *are* we to totally abandon fleshly desires?)

Truthfully, food, and the end result of eating it, are more rewarding when nutritious food is taken in appropriate quantities and eaten with delight instead of wolfing it down. Pure sex is indescribably more satisfying than perverted sex – notwithstanding the truth that there is pleasure in sin for a season. Serving others is more deeply

satisfying than demanding that others make us feel good. We must “reset” our thinking in many areas, and it’s a process!

**A proper understanding and experience** of being born again, followed by being transformed into the image of Christ, is powerfully life-giving. Unfortunately, Hebrews 5:12-14 (NAS) describes many Christians: *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. - - - 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.* Note the point of being trained by practice!

How long would it take you to **compose a list** of ungodly attitudes and habits that are regularly practiced and unchallenged among born again Christians? Sins like slander, gossip, complaining, lust, jealousy, selfishness, judgmentalism, pride, gluttony and materialism. Some are more obvious than others but all are overt violations of holiness. We all have areas of need and as James 3:2a says: *We all stumble in many ways.* None of us are qualified to “cast stones” at others.

And how about a list of godly attitudes and habits that we ignore on a regular basis, without consequence? Virtues like love, mercy, forgiveness, patience, forbearance, generosity, servanthood, servant leadership, husbands loving their wives, wives submitting to their husbands and much more. As we’re told in James 4:17, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

We will need to actively choose God’s rule again and again as the new nature within us is challenged by people and events around us. It’s a struggle sometimes, but the only people who don’t struggle are those who sin without a struggle, and dead people.

When the new nature rules – if God says “it’s good,” it’s good! If He says, “too much,” it’s too much. If He says “it’s bad,” it’s bad. It’s a wonderful truth that the more often we chose God’s way, the more natural it becomes to us! ([Romans 6:19](#))

I like the **definition of “total commitment”** that I heard years ago; “To be totally committed is to have committed all of myself that I know, to all of God that I know.”

We can only apply what we know. As long as the church presents a distorted concept of what it means to be born again, and accepts as normal the consequence of that, Christians will continue in an impoverished state. We cannot build a dynamic Christian experience on a diminished theology and watered down expectations of what “Christian” means. The church today desperately needs to understand our humanity; the meaning of “born again;” the imperative and process of growing into Christlikeness; and the power that is available to help us.

Paul had the same concern for the church in Ephesus. Please read [Ephesians 1:17-23](#); feel Paul’s heart; and ask God if he would write similarly to you, today.

## 17) Filled with the Spirit

While we might give different meaning to the words, Christians usually agree that we must be “filled with the Spirit,” as commanded in Ephesians 5:18b.

God intends that His Holy Spirit be actively involved in every aspect of life. For openers, it is He who convicts us of sin and leads us through the born again process and into the life of the Kingdom of God. I Corinthians 6:11b says: *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* And then there are countless scriptures that speak of the work of the Holy Spirit to instruct, cleanse, assure, sanctify, heal and more.

**The Holy Spirit’s work** is also to equip and empower us for fruitful service. Note the prayer of Jesus in John 17:16-19: *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* Jesus is sending us into the world for the same reason that the Father sent Him – that is, to make God known to the lost.

Something that we often miss is the connection between being sanctified, and dedicating ourselves to God’s agenda. But the two are inseparable and if we are truly sanctified we will be set apart *from* the world, *to* God.

In Acts 26:18 Paul recounts Jesus’ call on the road to Damascus. He was: *to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.* He goes on to say: *20b that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.* (NAS)

Being “saved” is not just an escape from hell. It’s being saved *from* all that Satan’s domain represents, *to* all that God’s domain represents. It assumes that we will engage with Him in the Cosmic Battle in whatever way He calls and equips us to. If you were a salesman for a luxury car dealer, he probably wouldn’t be happy if you just paraded around in the expensive monogrammed pullover he gave you, and watched potential customers come and go all day without trying to make a sale.

**In Acts 1:5 and 8** Jesus connects the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with our being empowered for ministry: *5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. - - - 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

That’s powerful, but before we go any further we need to know that an understanding of the Holy Spirit centers on the issue of Lordship. If Jesus is truly Lord of our life after we are born again, we will need the active work of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in Christ; to live victoriously and joyfully; and to serve Him effectively. That is the only context in which a discussion of what it means to be

filled, or baptized or whatever else you call it, in/with/by the Holy Spirit, can have real meaning!

Many Christians go through life with little awareness of the Holy Spirit, because they don't *need* Him to live at the spiritually mundane level they accept for themselves. However, when we declare Jesus, "Lord," and determine to live dynamically for Him and serve Him effectively, we'll feel the need for the Spirit's help. (And incidentally, the Holy Spirit is "He," not "it." He is the third person of the Trinity.)

**To those who lean away from** the supernatural gifts of I Corinthians 12-14 and elsewhere, I acknowledge that there is a common and unfortunate non-connection between the Charismatic/Pentecostal definition of being filled with the Spirit, and the ministry it is intended to effect. Too often, certain gifts are taken as marks of spiritual maturity (which they are not), and too rarely is "the baptism" connected to the overall surrender to His Lordship which Jesus would have assumed here.

However, I Corinthians 14:37-40 offers both affirmation and instruction to those who do embrace all of the spiritual gifts: *If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

**In our years in Kenya**, Elaine and I were privileged to concurrently serve a very Pentecostal denomination, and a non-Charismatic mission. We could do that without talking out of both sides of our mouth, because they were united in the things that mattered even if they strongly disagreed on secondary issues.

Each knew the other, and both knew of our dual service, but while they might not have enjoyed sharing a cup of tea with each other they were deeply enough committed to God's work that they both freed us to serve the other.

**I have on many occasions** over the decades partnered in ministry with persons from both sides of the "charismatic" fence. Honestly, there has never been a pattern of which was more effective. Effectiveness came from a heart yielded to God accompanied by love for those who needed to know Him.

To our shame we only rarely see the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit blended in the way they were in Jesus. Our inability to model His life in that way has been at incalculable cost to the Kingdom of God.

In the end, it's not our theology of the Holy Spirit that makes the difference. It's whether or not we are "filled with the Spirit," which is evidenced by our surrender to the Lord Jesus and dedication to all that His "name" means in personal life and ministry. His kingdom will be advanced if we will do that, and if we're humble enough to bless others even if their "take" on this or other issues is different. And when we're in revival mode those things won't matter!

## 18) A New Identity

Consider the prayer of Jesus in [John 17:11-16](#). Note how He speaks of our being *in* the world but not *of* the world. We are here physically, but our most important identity, and our source of provision, hope, joy and all that makes life good, are not found here. They are in the Kingdom of God.

We are to be “aliens and strangers” as Peter says in I Peter 2:11 (NAS): *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*. This mindset is a prerequisite to our fulfilling I Peter 2:9 which we will consider soon.

Wouldn't you agree that the typical American-Christian has little sense of living here as an alien or stranger? Aren't many predominantly earth-minded? Yet isn't Kingdom-identity a bottom-line ingredient to our successfully living as the people of God? And wouldn't that help a lot when change comes and diminishes or removes the opportunities and freedoms that we have depended upon?

Christians who view their years on earth from an earthly perspective will be dismayed by things to come. So much that defines “life” for them will be at risk. Money, jobs, position, power, security, safety, preserving Christian institutions and more will be threatened by coming events. They will easily slide into compromising their faith and betraying their brother.

Conversely, Christians who have a Cosmic Worldview will *not* be dismayed. Nor will they be as likely to compromise their faith and their brothers. It's the [Hebrews 11](#) life-view which simply says, “First things first.” Is it possible that those saints will become our brothers and sisters, and examples of faithfulness who inspire us to faithfulness ourselves, rather than just figures of Bible history? Read it and be honest about how closely (or distantly) the heart of the average Christian in America correlates to theirs.

**I am an American citizen and gratefully so.** I have lived in Africa and traveled a lot elsewhere. There's no place I'd rather call “home.” No flag I'd rather fly. But something which grips me in a much stronger way is my identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. *That*, is my deepest source of significance and purpose now, and my home forever. That will stand me in good stead if/when things “go down” in America.

If we have gone wrong, how could it have happened? Simply put, we have not lived here as aliens and strangers, and consequently we were subverted by the power of opportunity. Our identity has been much more as Americans than as citizens of the Kingdom of God. In times to come we will need a new identity – a new definition of who we are, if we are to stand firm. There's no better time to start than now! We could do it simply because we sense God's call to draw near to Him, without regard to world events, or because we see the need of it in light of approaching change.

## 19) A New View of Blessing

Why does God bless His people? Consider I Peter 2:9 (NAS): *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Notice the “so that,” there. Why does God bless and prosper an individual, a family, church, business or nation? A primary purpose is that through it, He would be made known to others. Certainly God delights in expressing His kindness and generosity toward those who love Him, for their enjoyment - but there’s more, and the better we understand it the better it seems!

I still have my old, green covered “Living Bible” from the 1970’s, with II Chronicles 16:9a underlined: *For the eyes of the Lord search back and forth across the whole earth, looking for people whose hearts are perfect toward Him, so that He can show His great power in helping them.* Yes, *that’s* His heart – to show His power and His goodness by blessing us. Its part of the Cosmic Battle and it’s a win-win-win thing for us; for Him; and for those who see His blessing upon us and are thus drawn to Him!

**Truth be known**, Christians who receive God’s blessing in a spirit of humility, and who then practice generosity, live much fuller lives than those who squander His blessing on their egos, soulish pleasures and efforts to assure security for the future! It’s sort of like comparing a stagnant, mosquito infested swamp to a vibrant, fish-filled lake which overflows to bless countless others downstream.

Applying that to America, I believe that God blessed us not only so we could live well ourselves, but to make Himself known to the ends of the earth. He gave us not only freedom but previously unimaginable financial and technological resources. We have had all that was needed to take the Good News to every nation, tongue and tribe in the world, in the language which speaks to their hearts. We have done that in some measure, but typically in a way that was secondary to living the self-centered American dream. An humble appraisal of the situation could only lead to the sad conclusion that we have essentially squandered God’s blessing.

As long as our eyes are on the earth and things of the earth, we will view blessing with an earthly mindset. As long as we look there to fill the hunger of our soul, we will receive God’s blessing into selfish hands “*where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.*” (Jesus, Matthew 6:19)

However, the moment we lift our eyes toward God and view blessing from *His* perspective – all that He has entrusted to us takes on new and exciting meaning. It is elevated above the blemishes of this world and reflects the sparkle of eternity. It’s an explosive, ecstatic, exuberant, invigorating experience which awakens something inside of us and calls for more! There’s nothing like the warm touch of His hand on your shoulder as He whispers: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been*



*faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*, as in Matthew 25:21.

What we're talking about here is the purpose-driven life which emanates from a Cosmic Worldview as naturally as fragrance does from roses. One where our significance and life-purpose are based on our being joined to the eternal purposes of God – Who is Life itself; the author of life; and the giver of life to all who humbly seek Him.

[Acts 4:29-35](#) is instructive in this discussion. Read it and feel the excitement; the power; and the outcome. Don't we crave those results? Could that be a model for us? The difficulty however, lies in v29 where they identified themselves as slaves/servants/bond-servants (depending on your translation). The mindset of being servants *of* God and thus servants *to* those who need to know Him, militates against the typical American-Christian mentality. Something within us is reluctant to welcome the title of "servant."

If we were to embrace a new view of blessing, we would be able to do far more with far less. Every good thing from God would be received in a spirit that would allow Him to multiply it in a way that gives Him glory and us joy – and which draws the hearts of others to Him. *That* is how you feed over 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. We might need to do that.

**An after-effect of this kind of life** is that, having connected with that which is real, anything less would become distasteful and even disgusting to us.