

The Spirit and Christ: Why You Can't Have One Without the Other

The Spirit of Christ

Somewhere along the way, a lot of us picked up a habit we didn't mean to pick up. We think of Jesus over here, and the Spirit over there. Jesus is the one we pray to. The Spirit is the one we ask for power, or gifts, or a feeling in a worship set. Two different requests, to two different parts of God, for two different things.

That habit is not just imprecise. It misses something the New Testament goes out of its way to show us: you cannot have one without the other. Not because they're the same person. They're not. But because everything the Spirit does, He does as the Spirit of Christ, and everything Christ is to you now, He is to you through the Spirit. Pull them apart and you don't get two clearer pictures. You get two blurred ones.

Let's trace this from the beginning of Jesus' life to the end of it, and see how tightly the two are woven.

Start with how Jesus came to exist as a human being at all. Luke tells us:

“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’”

LUKE 1:35

Before Jesus preached a word, before He healed anyone, before He chose a single disciple, the Spirit was already at work forming His humanity in Mary's womb. The Spirit doesn't show up later to

empower an already-existing Jesus. He's there at the very first moment there is a Jesus to empower.

Move forward thirty years, to the Jordan. Jesus hasn't done any public ministry yet. He's just been baptized.

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”

LUKE 3:21-22

This is the moment Jesus is publicly anointed for His mission. Everything that follows, the teaching with authority, the casting out of demons, the healing, all of it happens because the Spirit rested on Him and drove Him into that work, starting with driving Him straight into the wilderness to be tested. The Spirit isn't a footnote to Jesus' ministry. He's the reason Jesus' ministry has the shape and the power it has.

So here's a question worth sitting with for a second. If the eternal Son of God needed the Spirit's anointing to live out His mission on earth, what does that tell you about your own assumption that you can manage yours without Him?

Now push forward again, past the cross, to the resurrection. Paul writes:

“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. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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.”

ROMANS 8:9-11

Read that slowly and notice what Paul does. He says “the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Then in the very next breath he calls the same reality “the Spirit of Christ.” Then he calls it “Christ is in you.”

Three phrases, one indwelling. Paul isn’t being loose with his language. He’s telling you that to have the Spirit is to have Christ. There is no version of possessing one without the other.

This is where the Kingdom comes into focus. A king’s authority isn’t just wherever he happens to be standing. It’s wherever his rule is actually exercised. Jesus is the enthroned King, reigning right now at the Father’s right hand, and the way that reign reaches you, today, in your actual life, is through the Spirit He has sent. The Spirit isn’t a separate department from the kingship of Jesus. He is the King’s own presence and authority, extended into your life and into the world, before the kingdom comes in full.

Jesus makes exactly this point to His disciples the night before He died, and He puts it in a way that must have sounded backward to them at the time:

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

JOHN 16:7

Think about what He's saying. The physical presence of Jesus, standing next to you, walking with you, teaching you face to face, that's a good thing. But Jesus says something better is coming. Not a downgrade. An upgrade. Because a physically present Jesus can only be in one place at one time, with one small group of people. But Jesus present by His Spirit can be fully with every single believer, everywhere, all at once. The Spirit's coming isn't a consolation prize for Jesus leaving. It's how Jesus becomes more present to more people than He ever was in the flesh.

And what does the Spirit do once He arrives? Jesus tells them plainly:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

JOHN 16:13-14

The Spirit doesn't run His own agenda. He doesn't build His own following, or point people back to Himself. Every single thing He says and does bends toward one purpose: making Jesus known. That's the test, by the way, whenever anyone claims something is the Spirit's work. Does it point to Christ, or does it point somewhere else? If it points somewhere else, whatever else it might be, it isn't Him.

Paul takes this even further in a line that should stop you in your tracks:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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

Paul isn't collapsing the Spirit and Christ into the same person, as if the distinction disappears. He's telling you something about how completely the risen Christ now acts through the Spirit: so completely that to meet the Spirit is to meet the Lord. That's why practising the presence of the Spirit isn't some lesser, vaguer cousin of practising the presence of Christ. It's the same thing. It's the shape intimacy with Jesus takes now, this side of His ascension.

So bring it back down to where you actually live this week. Somewhere between now and next time we meet, you're going to reach a moment where you feel spiritually dry, or unsure what to do, or in need of strength you don't have. In that moment, will you treat the Spirit as some separate resource to petition, disconnected from Jesus? Or will you recognize that turning to the Spirit in that moment is turning to Christ Himself, present with you, ruling over that very situation as your King?

Because that's what Paul is telling you in Romans eight: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Galatians 4:6. The same Spirit who rested on Jesus at the Jordan and raised Him from the dead now

cries out in you, forming in you the same relationship with the Father that Jesus Himself has. Not a different gift. The same Son's Spirit, given to make you like Him.

Paul sums up the whole trajectory of what we've traced tonight with one astonishing sentence: "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." 1 Corinthians 15:45. The risen Christ has so entered into the fullness of the Spirit that He now gives life through Him to everyone united to Him.

So don't split what God has joined. When you pray for the Spirit's help, you are asking for Christ's own rule over your life. When you walk with the Spirit, you are walking with Jesus. It was never two separate asks, one to Jesus and one to the Spirit. It was always one ask, answered by one God.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1 This teaching says a lot of us treat prayer to Jesus and prayer to the Spirit as two separate transactions. Where have you noticed that split showing up in your own prayer life or the way your church talks about the Spirit?
- 2 Romans 8 uses three different phrases (the Spirit of God dwells in you, the Spirit of Christ, Christ is in you) to describe the same reality. What difference does it make to think of these as one thing rather than three?
- 3 Jesus says it's better for the disciples that He leaves and sends the Spirit instead. Why would presence through the Spirit actually be more, not less, than Jesus physically standing next to you?

Personal Reflection Questions

- 1 Think of the last time you felt spiritually dry or unsure what to do. Did you turn to the Spirit as a separate resource, or as Christ Himself present with you? What would it look like to do the latter this week?
- 2 The Spirit's whole work is to point to Jesus, never to Himself. Where in your own life have you looked for spiritual experience apart from a deepening knowledge of Christ?
- 3 Galatians 4:6 says the Spirit cries "Abba, Father" in you, the same relationship Jesus has with the Father. What would change in how you approach God this week if you actually believed that was true of you?