

The Spiritual Life in the Church Age

Have you ever awoken from a dream where you had acquired something that you have wanted for a long time, or you had amassed a great deal of wealth, and then, you wake up, and it is all gone? That is what death is going to be like for many believers. They are saved, and then they change many of their evil ways—they sin less and they are moral—and when they open their eyes after death, they will find out that their lives had very little spiritual impact. You may pass from death into life, and look around and notice that all you have to show for this time on earth is a resurrection body. However, God has made it possible for you to amass great wealth and blessing in the afterlife. Your life can have eternal impact.

There is a difference between Lot and Abram: Lot, when he finds himself among a lot of immoral people, is distressed over it, because he is moral; because it upsets him to see people acting outside of the laws of divine establishment. Abram has spiritual impact; Abram's spiritual impact will be parlayed by God into eternal results and rewards.

The difference is the spiritual life. In the Church Age, this is pretty simple, and discussed on several occasions. The spiritual life for all believers of the Church Age is to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2Peter 1:2 3:18). The idea is to, renovate your thinking (Rom. 12:1–2). The spiritual life begins at faith in Jesus Christ; is lost temporally when you sin, and is restored when you name to God whatever sin or sins got you out of fellowship (1John 1:8–10). At that point of re-entry into fellowship, you grow spiritually through God's grace system of perception (assuming that you are exposed to the teaching of Bible doctrine while in fellowship). This allows you to understand spiritual things along side of all the saints, which causes you to renovate your thinking.

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1. Like Abram, our spiritual life began the moment that we believed in Jesus Christ. **And Abram believed the LORD, and He credited this faith to his account as righteousness** (Gen. 15:6). **Know then that it is those of faith who are the [true] sons of Abraham [because] Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness** (Gal. 3:7, 6; Gen. 15:6).
2. Jesus, in His humanity, grew in grace and knowledge. **The child [Jesus] was growing [physically and spiritually], and was being empowered in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him** (Luke 2:40). The human spirit, which Jesus acquired at birth and which we acquire when we are reborn, is the repository for spiritual information. Jesus, in His humanity, grew spiritually, having been filled with wisdom. God's grace was upon Him. This is a pattern for us, except that, we lose the filling of the Holy Spirit from time to time; and Jesus did not.
3. At salvation, we are given God the Holy Spirit. Rom. 8:9, 11 1Cor. 3:16 12:13
4. We are mandated not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:30); we are mandated to

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- be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:22).
5. We get out of fellowship through sin; we get back into fellowship by naming this sin (or sins) to God 1Cor. 11:29–32 Heb. 12:11–12 1John 1:8–10
 - a. In 1Cor. 11:29–32, people are coming to the Communion Table out of fellowship, and their warning discipline is being parlayed into the sin unto death. They are to judge themselves (recognize the sin or sins they have committed) to get out from under discipline (**so that we should not be judged**).
 - b. In Heb. 12:11–12, the writer speaks about one being disciplined by God, indicating that the recipient is out of fellowship, and, therefore, a recipient of discipline. Lifting up the hands that hang down and the knees which are feeble refers to going from a non-productive life (being disciplined while out of fellowship) to a productive life).
 - c. 1John 1:8 speaks of the indwelling sin nature and 1John 1:10 speaks of the commission of sin by the believer. Therefore, sin in the life of the believer, is a certain reality. 1John 1:9 is the solution for sin in time; we name this sin (or sins) to God.
 - d. This is how our spiritual growth differs from the spiritual growth of Jesus Christ; He never had to be restored to fellowship.
 6. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any works; and the function of our spiritual life after that involves the renewing of the Holy Spirit. **He saved us, but not because of anything which we have done to gain His approval; but, instead, because of His compassion, He saved us; through the cleansing of the new birth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit** (Titus 3:5).
 7. However, that only gets us in and out of fellowship; spiritually (being filled with the Holy Spirit) is not spiritual growth; but it is necessary for spiritual growth.
 8. Therefore we are mandated to **Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** (2Peter 3:18a). Now note what follows: **To Him [is] the glory both now and forever. Amen** [I believe it] (2Peter 3:18b). Spiritual growth glorifies Jesus Christ both now and forever—eternal impact.
 9. God's Word is fundamental to this process: **For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of men as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls out, but the Word of the Lord endures forever** (1Peter 1:24–25a). What man is and what man does is temporal, and it will fade away, but God's Word stands forever.
 10. Grace is a key factor, because it is by means of grace that we are able to grow spiritually. **Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** (2Peter 3:18a). It is God's grace system which allows us the ability to hear, process and understand divine truth.
 11. This process is summed up in 1Cor. 2:10–16: **But God has revealed them [knowledge of the things which God has prepared for us] to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God [the Holy Spirit is integral to understanding spiritual things]. For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him [the human spirit is the repository for spiritual knowledge]? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit**

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of God. But we have not received the spirit of the world [which teaches human viewpoint], but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches [again, this is human viewpoint versus divine viewpoint], comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? Moreover, we [Paul and other Bible teachers] have the mind of Christ.

12. This same grace process is described in Eph. 3:16–19: He may give you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell [= be at home] in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the ability to comprehend **with all the saints** what is the breadth and length and height and depth [the full extent of God's plan], and to know the love of Christ that surpasses [human] knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
13. In other words, this is a grace system—all believers are able to participate in it—and integral to the process is the filling of the Holy Spirit. We learn divine viewpoint, which is quite different from human viewpoint. All believers are capable of learning God's plan for their lives; I.Q. is not a limitation. The only limitation is the volition of the soul.
14. Faith is a key factor. Spiritual knowledge is not simply a collection of facts, but these are things which must be believed in order for you to have spiritual impact. Faith is key to salvation: **For also we have had the gospel** [the good news of Jesus Christ] **proclaim** [to us] **as well as them. But the Word proclaimed** [to them] **did not profit them,** [because it was] **not being mixed with faith in those who heard it** (Heb. 4:2). God's Word has no profit to anyone, unless it is mixed with faith. **But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is rewards those who diligently seek Him** (Heb. 11:6). How do we seek Him? We seek for God in His Word. There is no call for us to seek God in any other way (going off on a high mountain, spending hours in meditation, inflicting pain or deprivation on oneself). Remember, Paul wrote, **"We have the mind of Christ."**
 - a. What is sad, in the United States, is, we no longer have a widespread understanding of the Word of God. From before our War for Independence up until about the 1940's or 1950's, a huge number of people knew the Word of God. Our constitution was crafted by believers in Jesus Christ who saw this work as divinely directed and inspired. Our spiritual heritage as a nation has been distorted and lied about in our history books, in order to make our failing schools seem reasonable and palatable to us.
 - b. We have almost completely lost this as a society. I saw an advertisement the other day for a local church, and, quite frankly, it was a damn freak

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show. Dozens of people are on stage meandering about with music and shouting.

15. Back to the topic at hand; the spiritual life: The result of growing in grace and knowledge is the renovation of our thinking. **Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renovation of your thinking, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God** (Rom. 12:1–2). Conformity to this age is adherence to contemporary norms and standards, which vary from culture to culture and age to age; it is thinking human viewpoint.
16. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews prays for the recipients of his letter: **Now may the God of peace (who brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant) make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen** (Heb. 13:20–21). God is glorified in eternity for what He does within us in time. Our spiritual growth results in eternal impact.
17. We find a similar sentiment expressed in the doxology of Eph. 3:20–21 **Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.** What God does in us has eternal impact.

We know all of this, because of what is taught in the New Testament; however, what we find here in Genesis is the seeds of this process. Abram is separated from his family through faith in Jehovah Elohim, and God gives him promises and assurances. Abram begins to grow spiritually, thus separating himself from his nephew Lot, and he begins to have an eternal impact. The above doctrine simply is the mechanics of that eternal impact, which we should have.