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Title

This is the last of our series on 'What is the gospel? I want to use a familiar cartoon tract to bring out a new point;

- **8x hey! presentation**

– the emphasis on these last three talks has been based on this last slide – turning around and starting the relationship, what to do when we have another 'apple incident' and making sure that the tube doesn't get cluttered (confessing our sin, walking in the light), and this morning's talk is about how do we walk with God and grow as Christians.

A lot of focus is rightly put on understanding the gospel and the amazing work that God has done for us, but in one sense it is like all the preparations for a wedding day, and the reality is that married life is more than just the first day, no matter how special that is – it is actually about the day to day, week to week, year to year sharing of life – so it is with our Christian walk; in this series we have seen the extravagant preparations God has done because he loves us and wants us to have a relationship with him forever; but our church mission statement says that we are a Baptist church family who seek to look up to God and out to the world to make **effective disciples** for Jesus Christ, it is a life long, lifestyle relationship.

One of the difficulties and sometimes disappointments that people have when they become a Christian is that not everything changes all at once – and if we suffer from 'all or nothing' thinking, we might conclude that if we still sin, or perhaps behave in ways that we think a Christian shouldn't, then maybe we aren't a Christian after all. This would make sense if we lived in an all or nothing world; but we don't – if an infant doesn't immediately speak or walk, we don't then assume that maybe they aren't a human being after all – instead we allow time for growth and change and learning, we would be much kinder to ourselves and each other if we took this approach with our spiritual development; we are born again, and made alive spiritually, but we may also have years of unhelpful habits and thinking which we need to outgrow – we can only do this as we continue following Jesus.

In our reading in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 Paul describes **three kinds of people**, and this will help us understand how to move forwards when we get stuck or go wrong. I am indebted to Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ for these ideas....

We have the **Natural person**, the circle represents the persons life, there is a throne or control centre, which has self (the S) on it, and you will notice that Christ (the cross) is outside the life, the blobby circles represent the aspects, interests etc of the persons life. Because we are not designed to live life without God, we do not have the resources to live a balanced and harmonious life, this does not mean the person is necessarily bad, they may be doing the best they can, but because Christ has not been invited into the life, they do not have eternal life because life is found in Christ, they do not have the resources they need to live the abundant life, because the power to live is found in him too.

Next we have the **Spiritual person**, this person has invited Christ into their life, they have been forgiven and received eternal life, and because self is now off the throne and following Christ, they experience the power he gives to live life – over time (not overnight) all the priorities and aspects of this persons life come into balance and harmony because Jesus is the centre. This person enjoys the fruit of the Spirit in his life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control.

Now if we had all or nothing thinking where we had to be one or the other we could get confused, because we would say ‘I have invited Christ into my life, but I sin, I feel guilty, I am on a rollercoaster where I am up one day and down another, I feel powerless, defeated, frustrated, I find it hard to pray, read the Bible - what is wrong?’

This is where we meet Paul’s third person;

The **Worldly person** – notice that Christ is in the life, they will go to heaven when they die, they potentially have the resources they need to live a joyful and fruitful Christian life, but what is wrong with the picture? Self is on the throne, and Christ has been displaced – this person is relying on their own wisdom,

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strength and even cunning to live life, and ignoring Gods power, even though it is there for them if they would let Jesus be Lord in their life. Our reading in Jeremiah described the blessed man who trusts in the Lord, who has hidden resources that keep him free from fear whatever the circumstances, but also the wretched state of the man who trusts in man, who struggles and doesn't enjoy good even when it comes; this helps us understand the plight of the worldly believer.

Fizzle – it is a hard place to be, and it is something that if left for a long time will lead us to backslide and live as though we weren't Christians at all – let me remind you, this is about the persons current experience, this is the passenger on the QE2 who has set off, will definitely arrive, but is as miserable and out of step with everyone else on the way. But God has made it simple for us, and has provided everything we need to become a spiritual person, we need to

Be filled with the Spirit – the Greek is a continuous verb; we are filled with the Spirit and over time change and grow to be spiritual people.

What it means 'Having Christ on the throne of our lives and being led and empowered to follow him'
He is both saviour and Lord.

Bill Bright introduced the analogy of spiritual breathing: I like this because there is the naturalness, and the fact that we don't just breathe once a week or month, but continually, and this simple concept works the same way, in a nutshell we...

Exhale the impure; confess your sin & appropriate forgiveness
'Paid in full' on the cross

And then...

Inhale the pure, appropriate the filling of the Holy Spirit: we do not have to ask for air, it is already around us, we simply need to breathe to receive the benefits – so too with the Holy Spirit, we do not have to ask that he be sent again and again, he came on the day of Pentecost to empower believers, and we simply need to 'breathe'; so how are we filled? We **ask**, and **receive** by faith, remember faith is simply taking God at his word, just as we would anyone else. And here is the basis for believing:

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We have the **Command** – be filled with the Spirit, the Greek verb is continuous, keep being filled (because as Tozer? observed, ‘I leak’) – if we have a command, is it God’s will that we be filled? Yes, which leads us to the second thought, which is Gods **promise** in 1 John 5.13-14

Train, fact – faith - feeling: so, if we ask Jesus to take the throne of our lives and fill us with his Spirit so we can follow him, does he? Yes, because he has promised – we must put our faith in the facts of Gods Word, not in our feelings, because feelings change, they come and go, but Gods Word is true and never changes, so no matter how you feel if you confess your sins, you are forgiven, and then you need to act on that truth and you will experience the forgiveness, so too with the Holy Spirit, you ask him to fill you, to lead you and empower you and he does – always, every time because Gods word is reliable.

Now this is something very down to earth, let me give you a practical thought, I use the beeper on my watch, every hour ask yourself the question ‘**who is on the throne?**’, a friend had a sticky dot, because the more he was under time pressure, the more likely he would start to rely on himself and take the throne, he realised that he also looked at his watch more frequently, so he began to ask himself, who is on the throne? But listen, if it is you, don’t beat yourself up, simply ask Jesus to resume his rightful place in your life, to fill you again with his Spirit and to lead you and empower you to follow him. Expect to do this frequently; that is why we can think of it as spiritual breathing, just keep doing it.

Receiving hands: so how can we do this? How can we walk in the light, enjoying Gods love and forgiveness, and walk in the Spirit, relying on his help and guidance? We come back to **sorry thank you please**, Lord Jesus, I need you sorry that I have taken your place on the throne of my life, thank you for forgiving me and sending the Holy Spirit, please take your place again and fill me with the Holy Spirit according to your command and promise, thank you. Amen.

Growing in hands