



SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The term “spiritual formation” comes from Galatians 4:19: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until **Christ is formed in you**”.

Spiritual formation is the formation of Jesus Christ in us. What an amazing concept this is – that Jesus Christ can and should be formed in us. What does this mean? It is such an unusual concept that we need to read more about it, to understand what it means. There are a large number of scriptures about it – as we look at and compare them, we can see more of what it means, and how it can take place in our lives.

2 Corinthians 3:18 talks about it. “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Again, the goal is the likeness of Jesus Christ – i.e. Jesus Christ formed in us. And it involves a process of transformation: change. Spiritual formation is transformation so that our likeness gets changed into His likeness.

It reminds me of Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” – that was the goal right from the beginning, but Adam failed to allow it to happen, so it’s up to us!

Ephesians 4:13 “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Again, the goal is the full likeness of Jesus Christ, or not really likeness, but **fullness!** (and the whole measure of it!) Nothing less than being Jesus Christ!

But isn’t that what verse 16 says – we **are** Jesus Christ, His very body. But how can the Church be His body, if each of us should be His body? How can we all at the same time be Jesus Christ? Well, we are talking about spiritual things!

Ephesians 4:15 “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

It’s a process of growing up into Him.

John 14:23 puts another slant on it. “Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

So it's not something we do of ourselves, forming Jesus Christ in us. It's something He does – He comes into us and lives in us. So the goal again, is Christ formed in us. And it happens if we obey Him – so we do have a part to play.

Colossians 1:27 shows it is a bit of a mystery. “Jesus Christ in us” – is again the goal.

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

How can we unravel the mystery? What does it really mean for God to be in us? I believe Philippians 2:5 is the key to the answer.

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:”
Mind – KJV; disposition – Weymouth; Spirit – Moffatt; Think as Christ thought - Beck

If we have the attitude, or mind of Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ is in us. He is in us to the extent that we think and act the way He does. We are to be like Him. He was willing to be like us.

Verse 7 “rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Interesting in Verse 7 He was made in the likeness of man.

2 Peter 3:18 “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

We must grow in His characteristics and ways – in that way we become more like Him so He is in us.

Grow in grace. What is grace? Unmerited pardon. Jesus lived for this purpose – so He could die to pardon us and therefore extend grace to us. We need to live our lives with regard to others in the same way – extending grace, forgiveness to them – being gracious and graceful, like Jesus Christ was.

Grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ – is initially knowing about Him, but there's a difference between knowing *about* Him and *knowing* Him. I know a lot about George Bush, but I don't know Him. The way to know someone is to have a personal relationship with them. Do you know Jesus Christ, or just know about Him? “Grow” – spiritual formation is a process, a lifelong process.

Philippians 1:9-11 ⁹“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”

Love to abound more and more. God is love – the more we love, the more we are like God, the more God is in us.

1 John 4:11-12 ¹¹“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

Can you imagine what an honour it is to have the Creator of the Universe, the Lord God Almighty, living inside of you! But when we love each other, that is exactly what happens.

We become more and more like Jesus Christ until we are filled with the fruit of His righteousness, because we live His way of life, i.e. be filled with the Spirit, which is being filled with Christ.

Philippians 3:21 “who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

This is the ultimate spiritual formation! Eventually Jesus Christ will transform our bodies at resurrection, So we will be **Spirit** like He is. He was willing to be like us, and He will give us the opportunity to be like Him.

But in the meantime, that can be happening inside us right now, if we do what it says in Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

This is the way Jesus Christ thinks. If we think this way, we will be like Him. He will be in us. If we let the Holy Spirit fill us, He will be inside us, thinking these thoughts for us, because we have surrendered our mind to Him.

2 Corinthians 10:5 “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

If every thought is captive to Christ, Christ will be living in us. Then we will be Jesus Christ, because we are what we think about.

How do we make every thought captive to Christ?

PRAYER helps us get our thoughts on God, think about things from His perspective, ask Him to live His life in us.

BIBLE STUDY enables His Word to come into our lives – reading His Word brings the Word, Jesus Christ, into ourselves, our minds and thoughts.

MEDITATION very much helps that – concentrating on imbibing the thoughts of Jesus Christ – putting our thoughts in line with His.

WORSHIP concentrates our thoughts on God and opens us up to His influence, His attitudes, coming into our minds.

SERVING OTHERS causes us to act like Christ, which helps us to think like Him and be like Him.

So these are tools to help us, but what we need to do is to tune our minds to His mind, to yield ourselves to His Spirit, which will work in our minds and fill them with love and peace and all the fruits of the Spirit, so Christ will live in us.

That's what spiritual formation is about! A process of transformation of our minds to be more and more like Christ, until we have Christ in us, the hope of glory.

So let's continue to grow into the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus Christ!



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