

# The new way of the Spirit

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Under the old covenant, believers understood personal salvation largely in terms of revelation, requirement, and response. Under the new covenant, a fresh element came in—the power of Christ to transform human life through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2 is an amazing chapter of the Bible. It holds a mystery from the heart of God.

What Paul describes there is the “in Christ” privilege and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit—a two-fold understanding Scripture says is unique to the new covenant.

This doesn’t mean you won’t find any hint of Spirit empowerment in the Old Testament. The promise is there, though in the shadows. Look at these Old Testament gems. . . .

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

“As for me, this is my covenant with them. . . . My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and for ever.” Isaiah 59:21.

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” Joel 2:28, 29.

“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced.” Zechariah 12:10.

## Understanding the “in Christ” teaching

The “in Christ” and Spirit baptism mystery appears to be seldom taught and little understood in much of modern Christianity. Yet it’s the central, unifying theme of New Testament teaching,

beginning with the gospel of John and extending particularly through the writings of Paul.

There are approximately 240 direct or indirect references in the New Testament to the experience of being “in Christ”. And you’ll find this same large number of references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The “in Christ” and Spirit baptism mystery is the most important new covenant understanding for church and personal life.

Here’s a summary of the stream of New Testament teaching on this subject. . . .

(1) Jesus prayed for a mysterious oneness of mind and heart between himself and his followers—so deep a oneness that it parallels the oneness between his own Father and himself. See John 17.

(2) Jesus told his disciples he had much more he wanted to tell them about this experience, but it was more than they could bear at the time. But he explained, “I will give you the Spirit, and the Spirit will guide you into all truth.” See John 16:13; also study 20:19–23.

(3) The new experience of Spirit and truth exploded into reality on the Day of Pentecost, which was a direct

fulfilment of God’s promise that he would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. See Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:16–18.

(4) During his three years in the Arabian desert (the same length of time as Jesus’ ministry), the apostle Paul received direct revelations from highest Heaven—“secret wisdom” not previously revealed. This mystery was the marvellous action of the Spirit of God in bringing people from all nations together into oneness in Christ—oneness with the mind and heart of Almighty God. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” “We have the mind of Christ.” See Galatians 1; 1 Corinthians 2; 2 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 3; Colossians 1.

According to both Jesus and the apostle Paul, the new covenant experience of being “in Christ” and filled with God’s Spirit is not an option—it’s the essence. What we are dealing with is “the new way of the Spirit.” It is dramatically different from the old way of “the code” or “the flesh”.



### “The code” and “the flesh”

“The code” and “the flesh” are terms focused on the experience of living as if we were still under the old covenant as it had developed in the church—that is, as if Christ had not come, had not died, had not taken out the rule-dominated system and brought in the new way of freedom and intimacy.

“The code.” Greek *gramma*—writing, letter, regulation. It’s a neutral term. But in Paul’s context, putting hope in the *gramma* is like being on death row and saying you deserve freedom because you’re now keeping the rules. It’s a mantra you’re probably familiar with: “I’ll be good from now on—I promise!”

“The flesh.” Greek *sarx*. Literally it means the raw meat of an animal. By extension it means the human physical body. Symbolically it means frail human nature with all its passions and moral impotence.

Paul found in his own experience that *sarx* stinks. It sounds cute but it’s no stretch at all to hear Paul saying in his letters, “If you’re trying to make it to heaven based on *sarx*, you’re dead meat!”

“The code” and “the flesh” describe a behaviour-based approach, pummelling ourselves and others into holiness in hope of securing salvation; relying on the written law of God and our strength to keep it. The old way is not only incompatible with the new way; it’s directly opposed to it. Look at these scriptures. . . .

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” John 3:6.

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.” John 6:63.

“Circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.” Romans 2:29.

“We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6.

“What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to

the Spirit.” Romans 8:3, 4 (NKJV).

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:6.

“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” 2 Corinthians 3:6.

“Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory . . . will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?” 2 Corinthians 3:7, 8.

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3.

Do you see the positive element in all these texts?

It’s the element that has power to get rid of its opposite. The opposite is the code and the flesh. The element that gets rid of them is the Holy Spirit.

Behaviourally based people in churches today are no doubt well intentioned and conscientious. But they could not be more mistaken about what brings holiness to God’s people.

It is always important to give God’s written law its role in pointing out sin. *Biblical* standards and expectations should be known and taught.

But when it comes to personal transformation, these have no power at all—except as they drive us in desperation to Christ, who is freedom; and to the Spirit, who is power.

“Their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” 2 Corinthians 3:14–17.

At Christ’s death the veil was torn in the temple; now it must be torn and taken away in our lives. Only then can we enjoy true Sabbath-rest. Hebrews 4:9, 10. Only then will the Spirit come in full power, Heaven’s freedom with him.

