

Knowledge is Power

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If there's a will, there's a way, right? Not necessarily.

The apostle Paul identifies the limiting factor in our service to God. **Romans 7:18**: "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*" We want to change, but we don't. We want to be better, but we aren't. We want to fulfill our potential, but we can't. We want to conquer sin, but we don't know how. Sometimes you feel like you can't because you really can't. Not on your own. **Romans 8:7-8**: "*the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*"

We all know what this feels like. We win one battle and we lose the next three. We resolve to change only to be crushed by the lusts in our flesh. This is the spiritual war described in **1 Peter 2:11**: "*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*" When we lose these wars, we feel the defeat and guilt of failure. "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (**Romans 7:24**).

The flesh is carnal and the human will is limited. There are no exceptions to this rule. No amount of effort, no amount of discipline, no amount of counseling, and no amount of encouragement can help us conquer our sins on our own. The sooner we accept this reality, the sooner we can get to work taking care of our problems.

What's the solution? The Spirit of God.

The Spirit is the only way to completely conquer our sins. God changes us in ways we can't change on our own. **Romans 8:13**: "*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" This is one of the great truths of the gospel. You don't have to change on your own! You don't have to do any of this on your own. Our transformed lives are the product of God working in us through his Spirit. Without the Spirit, our lives will not be transformed.

How do we stir up the Spirit inside of us? The Spirit is in the Word.

If you're looking for something more dramatic or mystical, you'll be disappointed. There are no shortcuts or magic tricks. After receiving the Spirit through baptism (**Acts 2:38**), the essential process through which we are filled with the Spirit is Bible study – knowing and understanding the Word of God. The Spirit is in the Word: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (**2 Timothy 3:16**). Here's an analogy. The Spirit is like a fire. This is the fire that enlivens our conscience and gives us power – God's power – over our sins. If the Spirit is the fire, the Word is the fuel. Filling ourselves with the Word of God stirs up the fire inside of us.

The entire New Testament confirms this message, that we are transformed through the Spirit through our knowledge of Christ within the Word. **Colossians 3:10**: "*put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*" A new man is created when we become a Christian, but what renews the new man? What is the continuing power of change? Knowledge. **Ephesians 6:17** agrees: "*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*"

This isn't hypothetical. Has your knowledge of the Word ever helped you grow? Helped you make the right decision? Helped you win a battle over temptation? It helped Jesus. Three times he was tempted by Satan, and all three times he responded by quoting Scripture.

What part of us is actually changed by the Spirit?

The Spirit changes the mind. As we fill ourselves with the Word, the Spirit changes the way we think. He changes our thoughts, he changes our priorities, and he changes our will.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (**Romans 8:5-6**).

This is one way in which the new law is different from the old law. Through the Spirit, the Word of God is incorporated into the mind:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Hebrews 8:10).

When we receive the Spirit of God through the Word of God, our minds are transformed. **1 Corinthians 2:16:** *“For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”*

What is the conclusion? Read the Bible, and don't be ashamed to start small. If you're like me, setting unreasonable Bible-study goals only leads to failure and guilt. So don't be ashamed to begin by reading just a few minutes every day. Remember it's not a race. Read slowly and methodically. Take time to understand every verse and every phrase. You might be surprised by what you've been missing.

[You have] been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:23).