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BETTER THAN SCRAMBLED SCORPION
2 Corinthians 3:17-18

When Carissa was in college she majored in history. To her dismay even though she took all the math she would ever need in high school her college required that she take a math class. Obviously that was because math is so crucial to the study of history. She did fine in her high school math courses but it is not her strength and it definitely is not appealing to her. Actually the word revulsion comes to mind. To add to the fun I don't want to say that the teacher she ended up with for her required class had been at it for a long time, maybe too long, but his first job was being a math tutor to a young George Washington. Now I am personally sympathetic to old guys who have been doing a job for a long time, but this guy had clearly put it on cruise control a long time earlier and was marking time until retirement. He also had the shortcoming that is not uncommon among some college teachers. That shortcoming is that he couldn't teach. He knew how to do math, but he couldn't explain his way out of a paper bag. Carissa called from school at the end of the semester, frustrated and concerned because there was material that was going to be on the final that she didn't understand. She asked her professor about it but his response wasn't much of an improvement on "just go do it." So I found myself talking long distance to my daughter trying to help her with math. I thought I was done with that when she graduated from high school.

Carissa did survive the math class but I was annoyed by the fact that I was paying a king's ransom to the school and I was still having to teach my daughter things I was paying them to teach. She had an issue with a professor who would tell her to do things but then wouldn't give her the help she needed to do it. That is now just an unpleasant memory, but what if God gave you an assignment that was beyond your ability then gave you no assistance and said, "just go do it." That would be frustrating and would create all kinds of negative results in our lives. We are considering the idea of being antifragile people who not only are able to survive chaos and stress, but to gain from them. Unfortunately that is not something we are able to just muscle up and accomplish. Here's one way God is infinitely better than George Washington's math tutor. He doesn't ignore our plight, but gives us the help we need to be antifragile. We will learn about this from 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. In this passage we will see some of what God has given us to make us antifragile.

HIS SPIRIT

The context of these two verses is that Paul is comparing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the message of the Law of Moses. That was the most common controversy Paul had to deal with. The Law of Moses was construed by most people to be the rules one had to live by to be accepted by God. This is the way humans naturally think religion works. Keep the rules and meet the standard in order to be accepted. In other words, you earn it. Most people know they're not perfect but they figure they're earning a passing grade. Some think they are in the 90's and getting an A, some think they are maybe only getting a C, but hardly anyone thinks he's flunking. The true meaning of the law and the Gospel is that everybody's flunking, and the only passing grade comes from trusting in God's grace through Jesus Christ. Paul tells us what we need to do is turn to the Lord.

What Paul says in verse 17 is surprising. He says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit." I expected him to write, "Now the Lord is Jesus Christ," identifying Jesus Christ as the Lord to whom we must turn to in order to find the acceptance from God that we long for. Why didn't Paul write that? Why did he say the Lord is the Spirit?

Paul has already said what I expected him to write. In verse 15 he wrote of that mask that keeps people from seeing and experiencing the truth, "only in Christ is it taken away." In other words it is only when people turn to Jesus Christ that they can see the truth. He is the Lord they must turn to.

I think Paul wrote, "Now the Lord is the Spirit" because he wanted to use the surprise effect of it to make a point. In verse 6 he said that he was a minister of a new covenant, a new way of relating to God, and he said this new covenant is "not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life." He was using the terms "letter" and "Spirit" to represent the two differing approaches to relationship to God. "Letter" means living by the letter of the law, obeying all the rules and earning it. "Spirit" signifies by grace, by trusting solely in God's provision of a sacrifice in Jesus Christ. There is a reason why Paul used "Spirit" to represent this fundamental idea.

The prophet Ezekiel revealed hundreds of years before Christ that God was going to make a new covenant, a new arrangement for human beings. In Ezekiel 36:26 we see that as part of this new arrangement God said he would give people a new heart. In verse 27 he said, "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

So this new arrangement would include having God put his very Spirit in a person. The Spirit would create a whole new heart, a heart that actually desires to do what God wants, not in order to earn something or to meet a standard, but as a response to what God had already done. It's a new way of thinking about obedience to God. It's obeying

not because you have to in order to get a passing grade, but because the Spirit of God is in you creating a desire to do what God wants.

Paul had believed since his earliest childhood in the “letter” approach to a relationship with God. He was convinced it was the truth and he excelled at it. He was the best at it, was certain of his success and dedicated himself to teaching this way to others. And then everything changed. He was confronted with the truth that all his excellent religion did was to lead him to the place where he had to ignore some obvious realities about himself and his own sin, chief among them that he was actually opposing God in the name of his religion, and he was opposing God!

But something else happened. He found love. He found peace that he had always wanted and never had before. He found joy. He found an ability to love other people, even people that he previously had despised. He found rest for his soul and a new kind of love for God that was real. He found that the Spirit of God was working in him, not to prove anything, not to earn anything, but simply producing life! It was a life that he never even knew was possible.

Paul’s eyes were opened to a whole new way of living. He learned about living by the Spirit rather than by the rules. A few years ago before our kids were married our whole crew was on a vacation together. We all decided we wanted to try stand up paddle boarding. We rented a board and each took a turn trying this new activity. One of us, Toby, is an accomplished surfer so for him this was child’s play. For some of us it was a bit more challenging. When my turn came I initially was a total flop. I would get up on the board but as soon as I tried to start moving I’d lose my balance and fall off. Toby came to my rescue. After watching my keystone kops attempts for some minutes and getting considerable comic relief out of it he said, “Dad, when you get up on the board don’t look down at your feet, look forward.” That made no sense to me. I needed to look down at my feet on the board to see which way I was falling so I could try to catch myself and regain balance. I decided, however, against my better judgment to live by faith. I chose to put my trust in Toby and his expertise. I chose to believe. I did what he said. Boom, I was up and paddling away. I won’t say I was the most graceful or steady stand up paddler the Pacific Ocean has ever seen, but I was able to stay up on the board and actually maneuver around in the ocean.

I was immediately and gloriously converted. I became a “don’t look down” evangelist. With everyone I talked to about stand up paddle boarding I shared my experience. I especially tried to share it with those who had never tried the sport but were thinking of doing so. I found great delight in those times when I would share my conversion story with someone else who proved to have had the same experience. That’s what happened with Paul. He put his faith in Jesus and everything changed. To his shock, he found the

life that he had always wanted, he discovered he had a new heart, and he found that he had something that had never been there before. The Spirit of God had taken up residence in his own soul.

By saying “the Lord is the Spirit” Paul was saying when one enters this new covenant he or she receives the incredible gift of having the Spirit of Christ come live inside that person’s soul. If you are a part of the new covenant, if you have put your faith in Jesus and trust in God’s grace, you have the Spirit of Christ in you.

Unfortunately I don’t always *feel* like the Spirit of Christ is in me. I often think that if he were I ought to feel...different somehow. I ought to feel more godly, more holy, more spiritual, more powerful. I should be less self-obsessed, more loving, wiser, more zealous, more effective in bringing God’s truth to people.

Yet here is a truth that is clear in Scripture. There are two classes of people. One is people who are not a part of the new covenant with God. They have not put faith in Jesus. They do not have the Spirit of Jesus in them. The other is people who are part of the new covenant. They have put their faith in Jesus. As God promised through Ezekiel they have the Spirit of God living in them. There is no third class of people who have opted in to the new covenant, who believe in Jesus, but who have not received his Spirit. The promise is clear. As part of the new covenant you get the Spirit of Christ. You can’t get the new covenant and not the Spirit.

I mentioned recently that I have a new tablet computer. I use it instead of paper notes on Sunday. This particular tablet computer came with software that enables it to operate as a universal remote control. Remote controls are a true gift to the human race. I can’t believe that at one time in my life if I wanted to change channels on the TV I actually had to stand up, walk over to the set and turn a knob. But as terrific as remotes are, they have one drawback. They’re like rabbits. They multiply. We’ve got 4 of them on our coffee table. We have a remotes for the TV, the cable box, the sound system and the DVD player. It gets kind of overwhelming. My tablet computer is able to simplify all that. It can operate as a remote for all those devices. Just one remote! However, I didn’t buy the thing for that purpose. I got it to use on Sundays for notes. I knew it had this capability, but I wasn’t interested in that. However, it was part of the package. When you buy the tablet you get that capability whether you use it or not.

For the first month I ignored that whole thing. I figured it was too high tech for me. The tablet was doing what I needed, so I was happy. One day at home I said, “I wonder what else this can do?” I saw the remote icon on it and thought I should see how complicated it was to use, mostly out of curiosity. I tapped the icon and the thing took me step by step through a nearly foolproof, simple process. It works! That’s not really

my point. My point is, I may not have been employing the remote control capability, but it came as part of the package. You can't get this tablet computer without it. The Holy Spirit is part of the new covenant package. He's standard equipment on this model. You cannot get the new covenant package without him.

That means if you are truly a believer in Jesus, you have his Spirit living in you, ***whether you feel like it or not!*** That's God's promise, and God neither lies nor fails to keep his promises. Romans 8:9 says, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." If you belong to Christ then you have his Spirit.

Nothing can make us more "antifragile" than having the Spirit of Jesus living in us. Take some time and look at what the Bible says the Spirit of Jesus does in our lives. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 says he makes it possible for us to understand God and what he is doing in this world and in our lives. Romans 8:16 says he enables us to have a sense that we are indeed God's children. Romans 15:13 says he gives us hope. Ephesians 3:16 says he strengthens us. Romans 8:26 says he actually prays for us. 1 Thessalonians 1:6 says he produces joy.

Note especially the last 4 words of 2 Corinthians 3:6. The Spirit gives life. The Greek text actually says, "the Spirit makes alive." The Holy Spirit brings our souls to life. He makes us alive to God. He enables us to believe. He gives us spiritual birth and he produces real life. Jesus said in John 7:38, "whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." In verse 39 John explained, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

I love that picture. We were talking to our son-in-law, Michael, not long ago. He was telling us about where he is in Afghanistan. Off in the distance quite far away he can see mountains. But all around him it is a flat plain almost totally devoid of any kind of foliage. It's just dirt and sand. Featureless, barren land. Nothing but dust. By way of contrast I think of where Linda Kaechele went with her husband a couple of weeks ago vacation. They visited the island of Kauai in Hawaii. Kauai is lush and green. It is spectacularly beautiful. Between where Michael is in Afghanistan and where Linda went in Kauai, which scenery would you prefer? No brainer. Kauai wins by light years. Why is it different from Afghanistan? One word – water. There is a lot of water there and water produces life.

Jesus says the Spirit will be like rivers of living water, producing an internal landscape that is lush, green, alive. Without him what will result is a dusty plain, as barren as Afghanistan. That lush life is not dependent upon being watered from the outside. It is

living water that will come from the inside out according to Jesus. Streams of living water will flow from within. Dry circumstances, difficulty, chaos do not stop the stream from flowing. What could be more antifragile? But there are a couple of specific things the Spirit will do in us that Paul tells us about in these verses.

FREEDOM

Paul says, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Wherever the Spirit goes, there will be freedom. There is no such thing as the presence of the Spirit of Christ and an absence of freedom. It’s kind of like garlic. Wherever garlic goes, that taste and smell of garlic go. It’s absurd to say, “I would like garlic if it just didn’t have that strong taste.” Wherever garlic goes, that taste exists. Wherever the Spirit goes, freedom exists.

Many people find this surprising. They think of Christianity as something that takes freedom away. They don’t think of it as a freeing thing. Yet it is the most freeing thing in the world. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1 “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

What kind of freedom does the Spirit produce? It is not freedom from consequences. There are some things that are true in this world that will always be true. One of those is that actions have consequences. If I choose to have jelly doughnuts for breakfast, a cheeseburger and fries for lunch, and pizza for dinner with apple pie for desert every day, freedom in the Spirit will not keep me from experiencing the consequences of my choices and bearing a striking resemblance to Shamu.

The Spirit of Christ may be in you making you free, but if you make the choice to intentionally violate God’s teaching, which is given to you to show you the way to wholeness and joy, then you will experience the consequences of your choices. This is one reason why we should all be motivated to obey God. He instructs us in how to live a life full of the things we long for like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and so on. We are free to reject his instruction and do it our way. But our freedom will not protect us from the consequences when we do so. We will experience those consequence and lose fullness of life.

But then what is this freedom that the Spirit will produce? It is freedom from the need to justify ourselves. This may not seem like a big deal, but in fact it is one of the most freeing things in the world. All of us are continually driven by this need. But the Holy Spirit tells us we are justified before the Father fully. We no longer have anything to prove. Romans 5:1 says, “therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This removes the need to justify ourselves before people, including ourselves as well. That's a freedom that is the best thing in the world. What if someone doesn't like me, what if they don't approve of me, what if they don't think I'm good enough, smart enough, talented enough? It doesn't matter. I'm justified before God and my worth is in him, not in people's opinions.

Because we are justified the Spirit also produces freedom from fear. I don't need to fear eternal punishment. I don't need to fear that when I stumble God is going to slap me down for it. I don't need to be weighed down by guilt. There is enormous freedom in the Spirit. Freedom to be who we are in Christ, to know that we are loved and need add nothing to what God has done on our behalf.

GLORY

Paul says in verse 18 "we all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory." Those who have turned to the Lord, who have the Spirit are seeing God as he is. When we do that it has an effect. It changes us.

Having the Spirit in us is going to transform us. The Greek word is *metamorphoo*. It says we are going through a metamorphosis, being changed from one thing into something that looks very different. You know what a metamorphosis is? In modern television terms it is an extreme makeover. The whole makeover fad started a few years back with the home makeover thing and the personal makeover thing. It has expanded where now there's a restaurant makeover show, a hotel makeover show, a wardrobe makeover show and the Biggest Loser, which is a show in which one's weight is transformed.

In all these shows the dramatic moment is when the new thing is revealed. The old house has become something new and beautiful. The old body is completely changed into something so different and so much better it is almost unrecognizable. The old disgusting restaurant has become an exciting new bistro. The dying hotel has become a resort.

The Spirit is in the process of doing an extreme makeover on us. Note that it is not a one shot deal. It is a process with ever increasing glory. But we know what it will look like when it is done. We are being made over into the image of the Lord. The word translated "image" here is the Greek word *eikon*. We have that word in English. It is used a lot now to speak of computer icons.

On our computer screens there are icons, little representations of programs and files. There are little pictures of manila folders with things inside. These represent files I

might want to look at. One I use a lot is a little picture of a page with a W in the corner. It represents Microsoft Word. The icon depicts something. Paul says we are being made over into little icons of God. We are being changed in such a way that we will depict God. We are becoming little representations of what God is actually like.

Suppose that you get a big promotion at work that comes with a whopping big bonus and pay raise. What the Spirit is doing is to make you an icon that will in a little way depict the way God would respond to having this new, prestigious position and all this money. Would God become insufferable proud and arrogant because he was given this new, powerful position? Would he have no time or respect for other insignificant people because he is too great for them now? Would he see this big new pile of money simply as an opportunity to buy lots more better stuff and to just be rich? Or would God respond differently, with humility, gratitude and a desire to use this new position to be a blessing to others? Would he see the new money as a chance to be generous and share with others? Clearly the latter is the way God would respond.

Suppose that you are at the other extreme. Rather than being promoted you are fired from your job. How would God respond in that situation? Would he be angry at those who fired him? Would he hold onto resentment and every chance he got verbally rip them apart? Would he look for an opportunity to do them some harm in return? Would he freak out, go screaming into the night because now he is out of money and had no hope? Or would he respond with grace toward those who fired him? Would he exhibit kindness and respect toward them? And would he be at peace with the fact that his income has disappeared, knowing what he needed would be provided? Obviously God would display the second group of responses.

The great thing about this is that being an icon is something we can do every day of our lives. This is the most antifragile thing in the world, because no matter what happens to us and around us, whether it be good or bad, we can be that icon that depicts for people what God is like. The Spirit wants them to see how God would react to whatever situation occurs in our lives. So at every moment, in all that happens, we have the chance to do this.

Paul says this is happening with every increasing glory. Glory is something we want. Glory is that which sets someone or something apart. It is what makes that person or thing noteworthy and elicits praise. San Diego is a glorious city. What is its glory? It is its weather and its physical beauty as a city on the Pacific Ocean coast. Many cities have an aspect of glory. The glory of Kansas City is barbecue. The glory of New Orleans is jazz music and Cajun food. What is the glory of Bakersfield? Can I get back to you on that?

What is the glory of God? It is his character and his being. What sets him apart is that there is no other being like him. He is worthy of praise because he is holy, perfect in love and goodness, just, all powerful and all knowing.

We all long for glory, for every human being desires to be special, to be somehow set apart, to be noteworthy and to elicit praise. Paul says the Spirit of Christ will do an extreme makeover on us that will take us from glory to glory. There is glory in what he will do. In fact there is no greater glory. That's because there is nothing more glorious than to become more and more like Christ and to become an icon that depicts the character of God. That is the most important, the most noteworthy, the most special calling of all. It is truly glorious, and it is also, as mentioned the most antifragile role in all of creation.

APPLICATION

So God has given us his Spirit and this makes us antifragile. But how do I experience that? How do I experience the Spirit's work?

BELIEVE

First we have to believe that God keeps his promises. That means that we have to believe that the Spirit of Jesus is in us even when it may not feel like it or always look like it.

Second we have to keep believing in Jesus. In John 7:37-39 where Jesus said that his Spirit would be like a river of living water flowing in us, he said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

So if we are thirsty, meaning we want that living water of the Spirit we have to drink of Jesus. What does that mean? We have to believe in him. Believe that in him we have eternal life, we are forgiven, accepted and loved by God. There's an important piece of grammar that is involved in that verse. Where Jesus said "let him come to me and drink" it was a present tense. That means it could be translated, "let him continually come to me and keep drinking." In other words, we have to keep believing that what God supplies in Jesus is enough.

That means we believe, we live by faith that God's commands to us are true and good and that what God brings into our lives day by day is going to be for our good. It means we keep believing that Jesus' Spirit is in us, when we feel like it and when we don't.

ASK

In Luke 11:11-12 Jesus said, “Which of your fathers, if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” This is Jesus at his stand up comedy best. Imagine the kids are getting ready for school. It’s time for breakfast. Dad asks, “Hey kids, what do you want, Frosted Sugar O’s or some eggs? The kids say, “We feel the need for a hearty breakfast today. We think we need some protein, so how about some scrambled eggs, Father dear?” Dad says, “Coming right up.” He goes over to the stove spends a few minutes cooking and then sets plates in front of the kids and on each plate is a scrambled scorpion. Who would do such a thing? No one!

We only do good to our kids. We want to give them what they want and need and do so. Jesus went on in verse 13 and said, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” You’ve already been given the Holy Spirit. But if you ask God to fill your soul with him and to control and strengthen you, don’t you think he will do it? Jesus said he would.

Ask him as you start your day. In those days when you are weary, down, feel like you've got nothing to give to anyone ask God to fill you with his Spirit. Do you think he will give you scrambled scorpion? When you child is doing an amazing imitation of the demon possessed guy in the Bible that they couldn't even keep chained, ask God to give you his Spirit. He will not give you scrambled scorpion.

CHOOSE

Remember my tablet computer. It came with the software to work as a universal remote control. I had it, but for a month I chose to ignore it. You have the Spirit of Christ if you are a follower of Jesus. He comes as part of the new covenant package. But you can choose to ignore him.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul said “live by the Spirit.” Literally he wrote, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Literally you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The flesh, the thing in us that wants to do things our way by our own power, the thing that is all about me, produces desires. But if you will recall Ezekiel 36:26-27 God promised that the Holy Spirit will be in us and will also produce desires. You can choose to live by the flesh and pursue its desires, or you can choose to pursue the desires the Spirit produces. As you go through your day choose to live by the Spirit, choose to follow those desires that the Spirit produces rather than those the flesh produces.