

THE
Holy
SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit & Revelation

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:12–14).

A major responsibility of the Holy Spirit was to teach select men God's message for mankind so that they could speak and write His Word. The Bible contains the revelation God made known to them through the Spirit.

HOW DID THE SPIRIT REVEAL THE MESSAGE?

Paul used the word *theopnustos* ("God-breathed"), translated "inspired of God," to describe how the Scriptures were given: "All Scripture is *inspired by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; emphasis mine). Since this passage does not explain the means God used, we must study other passages to learn how God revealed His Word.

The Bible teaches that God gave the Scriptures to select men *through the guidance of the Holy Spirit*. Those who wrote the Scriptures did not originate what they wrote. What they wrote was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Jesus told His apostles (Matthew 10:2–4), "... do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matthew 10:19, 20). Notice what Jesus promised: (1) They should not worry about "how" they would express themselves. (2) They should not be anxious about "what" they would say. The reason for their confidence was that (3) what they were to speak would be "given" to them. (4) They would not be the ones speaking, but (5) the Spirit would be the One speaking "in" them.

What the apostles taught, therefore, did not originate with them. Their words were given to them by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:13). Some who object to this idea have pointed out that since the authors wrote in their own individual styles, the thoughts alone must have been given to the writers so that they could convey the inspired teachings in their own words. This is an unnecessary conclusion, and it contradicts what Jesus said would happen.

Used Their Styles

If the Holy Spirit could use the vocabulary and the native language of each writer, why could He not also use his unique style and manner of expression to reveal God's Word? A skilled musician can play the same tune on a number of different instruments. A trained listener can hear a tune and identify what instrument is being played. Each instrument has a different sound, but the well-played tune is always the same. In a similar way, the Spirit used the individual writing style of each inspired man. He said exactly what He wanted to say, while using the man's manner of expression.

R. C. H. Lenski correctly observed,

The very fact that the Spirit used each writer with his fund of words and his personal style when recording the gospel shows that everything mechanical was removed from this teaching of the Spirit. If he had compelled all of the writers to use the same fund of words and the same style, we might harbor the suspicion that he proceeded mechanically, and only then, and even then we might be mistaken. Amid all the variety that resulted from the dynamic use which the divine Master Teacher made of the different writers the one astounding fact stands out: not a single writer utters a false note, uses one false word or phrase, or contradicts with a single statement expressed in his style what another holy writer expresses in a different style.¹

Used Their Words

Paul also taught that the Holy Spirit revealed the message in "words" to inspired men. He wrote, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13). Paul expressed the things of the Spirit in "words" taught by the Spirit.

Lenski said, "The very words which the apostles speak are taught them by the Spirit. He is their teacher even as to the 'words.' This is proof positive for Verbal Inspiration which is taught throughout the Scriptures and is actu-

ally and factually apparent in the Scriptures."² Instead of revealing just thoughts, the Spirit gave the very words that were to be used by those whom He inspired.

An important passage in understanding how the Spirit inspired the writing of the Scriptures is 1 Corinthians 2:12, 13:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

In order to understand this passage, we must first determine whom Paul meant by "we." Sometimes Paul referred to himself as "I," but at other times—using not only himself but also other inspired teachers as examples and authorities—he used "we." In the first part of 1 Corinthians 1, he consistently used the first person "I" (vv. 4, 10–12, 14, 16); however, later in the chapter he switched to "we": "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness" (v. 23). In this verse he did not mean the listeners when he said "we," but was referring to himself and other inspired preachers.

Paul followed the same pattern in the first part of chapter 2, referring to himself as "I" (vv. 1–3). Then, in verses 6 and 7a, he alluded to other teachers of God's Word: "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; . . . but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery."

Some, ignoring this pattern, include un-inspired Christians in the word "we" in 1 Corinthians 2:12. They teach that Christians understand God's Word only because the Spirit reveals its meaning to them. This was expressed by Gordon Fee: "Paul . . . is referring to salvation through the crucified one (as in 1:23, 24; 2:2). And God's people 'understand' that precisely because they have received the Spirit."³

Paul was not teaching that the Spirit personally teaches or reveals God's Word to every Christian or that people cannot understand the

²Ibid., 111–12.

³Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 113.

¹R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 112–13.

Word unless they are helped by the Holy Spirit. Rather, he was teaching that God has revealed His wisdom through men inspired by the Spirit. Through that revelation, God's thoughts can be known (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

HOW DO WE LEARN GOD'S WORD?

Not From a Worldly Viewpoint

Paul gave two reasons why the unspiritual person neither understands nor accepts God's Word: (1) God's revelation is "foolishness" to him. The teachings of God are foreign to the unspiritual person because of his worldly way of thinking. Paul explained, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18a); "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Since God's wisdom is outside the worldly person's way of thinking, he does not accept it. (2) God's revelation is "spiritually appraised." Because the unspiritual person judges wisdom from a worldly point of view, he cannot understand God's truths:

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, . . . that no man should boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

"Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes" (Matthew 11:25b).

"He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (John 8:47).

The Spirit was given to the apostles and prophets so that they could "know" (1 Corinthians 2:12) the mind of God. The Spirit gave them God's "words" so that they could reveal His Word to the rest of us and make it possible for us to understand God's wisdom. The Word, not the Spirit, is given to us through them so that we can understand the things of the Spirit. We must learn the will of God by studying the Scriptures, while the apostles obtained it by direct revelation from the Spirit. We learn God's Word by reading it from a spiritual perspec-

tive, but they received it by direct revelation from the Spirit.

Through Continued Study

The Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles and prophets the mysteries of God which are now contained in the writings of inspired men. These were written to inform us, to give us understanding, and to bring us to the knowledge of God's truth. They were not written to confuse us. Through continual study of God's Word, we can come to know the truth. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31b, 32).

Paul wrote,

For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13).

By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-5).

The apostles and prophets wrote in order to reveal God's truth to us. We can come to understand this truth by reading. Nowhere are we told that we cannot understand this truth unless we have the Holy Spirit. The concept that the Holy Spirit guides each Christian into the truth has a mystical appeal, but it is not founded on any scriptural principle.

Those who misunderstand the basic principles of God's written Word do so because of their own lack of study and meditation. The Spirit has not failed to illuminate them. Peter wrote that Paul's letters contain "some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). The way to avoid this was to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18a). Peter blamed the lack of understanding and perversion on an unlearned condition, not on a failure to receive personal guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Those who wrote the Scriptures did not veil God's Word in mystery so that only those

helped by the Spirit could understand it. With the Spirit's guidance, they wrote so that anyone can read and understand God's revelation.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND GOD'S WORD?

Jesus spoke concerning what He gave the apostles:

He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me (John 14:24).

For the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them (John 14:8).

I have given them Thy word (John 17:14a).

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me (John 12:49, 50).

The New Testament message began with Jesus. "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard" (Hebrews 2:3b).

The words Jesus received from the Father were the words He spoke to the apostles. After Jesus left the earth to return to the Father, these words were brought to the apostles' minds by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The revelation, confirmation, and preservation of God's Word were dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Revelation

The Scriptures we have are God's Word because the Holy Spirit revealed the Word to those who wrote it down. "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20, 21). What is stated in the Scriptures is not the prophet's interpretation of what God wanted to say. The prophet's personal opinions do not appear in the Scriptures. The use of "for" in 2 Peter 1:21 attaches that verse to verse 20, which refers to "one's own interpretation." Peter wrote, "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit

spoke from God." What a prophet wrote was not his own private interpretation of what God wanted revealed, but was God's own message. (See also Matthew 10:19, 20.)

In Confirmation

The Holy Spirit not only revealed the Word, but He also confirmed it. The writer of Hebrews stated concerning Jesus' teaching, "It was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (2:3b, 4). Other Scriptures state:

And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20).

Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands (Acts 14:3).

God confirmed His Word through miracles and signs.

In Preservation

The Word that was given through the Holy Spirit was preserved in written form by the hands of inspired men. Paul said, "... the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14:37). The teachings Paul gave were revealed to him by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13), the same source by which others spoke and wrote (Ephesians 3:3-5).

Through the Holy Spirit the Bible has come to us as the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is God's medium through which He has revealed His Word to us. In this present Christian Age, Jesus—the One who has all authority (Matthew 28:18)—personally brought the Word to mankind and then preserved it through the writings of men who were guided by the Holy Spirit. Based on the work of the Holy Spirit, we can have confidence that each part of the Scriptures contains God's infallible revelation to us. ■