

A sunset over a landscape with palm trees and mountains. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon. The foreground is dark, with the silhouettes of palm trees and mountains visible.

# GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Biblical Research Library*  
Roger E. Dickson

---

## CONTENTS

- 1 – *Introduction To Fundamental Truths* – 3**
- 2 – *The Person Of The Holy Spirit* – 19**
- 3 – *The Justice Of God* – 24**
- 4 – *The Free-Moral Agency Of Man* – 29**
- 5 – *The Work Of The Inspired Word* – 37**
- 6 – *The Miracles Of God* – 49**
- 7 – *The Providence Of God* – 64**
- 8 – *God’s Medium Of Work* – 70**



Africa International Missions  
Copyright 1995  
Cape Town, South Africa  
[africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org)

Cover theme: *TONGUES OF FIRE* (Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa - R.E.D.)

# GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

**The manifestation of God who works on behalf of Christians is the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of creation unto this present time, the Spirit has worked among men in order to bring about the purpose for which the world and man were created. He works among men in order to bring faithful believers into eternal dwelling with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In reference to this dispensation of time, the work of the Spirit was prophesied in the Old Testament, proclaimed by Jesus, and subsequently manifested by coming in power upon the apostles in A.D. 30. Since His coming on the apostles, He has worked among God's people and the world in order to work all things together for good for those who love God. It is essential, therefore, that the Christian be knowledgeable of the person of the Spirit and His work on behalf of the Christian in a world of struggle and temptation.**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction To Fundamental Truths

In this chapter we embark upon a very intriguing study that is focused on the Holy Spirit and miracles. This is a subject that is often misunderstood simply because men have found it fascinating to speculate concerning things of the spirit world. As a result of this speculation, there is much heated debate in the religious world over the work of the Holy Spirit. There is much confusion. Because of the great lack of biblical knowledge on the existence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, there are all sorts of entangled, and often useless debates in the religious world.

There are some areas of study of the Holy Spirit that have been disagreed upon since the close of the first century. I do not intend to write a final answer on the subject, nor to settle all the debate. How-

ever, I do want to challenge your thinking, excite your studies and give you an opportunity to lovingly disagree with me. I seek to stimulate honest reinvestigation of the subject of the Holy Spirit in order to bring you to a greater understanding of His work in this present world. In studying or discussing this subject, it would be good to remind ourselves of the marvelous words that were made in *Lard's Quarterly* over one hundred years ago:

All who have capacity enough to admit that some of our views on this subject [the Holy Spirit] may have been erroneous, will no doubt be benefitted in reading up the discussion; those who are too weak to make such admission would do

as well perhaps to spend their time some other way. The world has always had its men who, too weak to discuss fairly, have spent their little force in denouncing. This has always been the unfailing source of division among good people; for the reformer, never desiring to leave the church to which he belonged, but to reform it, has nevertheless been uniformly driven out of the church because of his newly developed truths. This was the case with Luther, Wesley, Campbell, and of all others such as these. **Let us, then, never be chargeable with an imbecility that disqualifies us for a reinvestigation of any subject that fairly commands our attention** [emphasis mine, R.E.D.].<sup>1:155</sup>

When we study the subject of the Holy Spirit there are some principle challenges that hinder this study and often make the subject either controversial or misunderstood. These problems cause controversy in most biblical subjects. However, when it comes to a study of the Holy Spirit, the controversy sometimes becomes heated because the subject is often more emotional than intellectual. Therefore, it is imperative that the objective Bible student not allow the following things that hinder objectivity to stand in the way of an effective study of the Holy Spirit:

### **A. Hindered by a lack of biblical knowledge:**

God said to Israel, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ...”* (Hs

4:6). This same principle applies today. The lack of biblical knowledge on the subject of the Holy Spirit may be the reason why there is so much confusion over this study in the religious world. T. J. Finley wrote, **“Perhaps one of the great dangers in all the Holy Spirit controversy is that not enough of us will do any independent thinking. We will take the views of our teachers and preachers as if they are infallible and will not think things through for ourselves** [emphasis mine, R.E.D.].”<sup>2:326</sup> This seems to be a major problem in understanding the existence and work of the Holy Spirit. Many people are caught up in an emotional movement wherein objective knowledge is forsaken for feelings. In this whirlwind of emotion and misguided emotions, objective Bible study is forsaken while men and women allow their religion to ride on the surf of feelings. Regardless of the emotions of the moment, we must encourage independent thinking in Bible study. Our thinking must be directed by the word of God. All concepts of the Holy Spirit must be determined from Scripture that was inspired by the Spirit. Roy Deaver correctly stated,

Our only source of information regarding the Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Bible. We must be willingly anxious to lay aside preconceived notions, superstitions, feelings and prejudices—and study the Bible to see what it says about the Holy Spirit. Everything that we know, or can know, about the Holy Spirit comes from the Bible—which is a product of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3:10</sup>

There will always be those who will forsake the word of God in order to search for other standards of religious authority. The spiritual vacuum produced by a lack of knowledge of God's word will move some to seek for feelings and nudges from the spirit world. Many in the denominational world have fallen into this vacuum of knowledge concerning the word of God. Those in the world of witches and "isms" and agnostics have given up a knowledge of the one true God. In order to satisfy their God-created spiritual yearnings, they have sought out every conceivable answer to those things about which they know nothing. They are as men about whom Paul wrote, "... *always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tm 3:7). Both Peter and Jude wrote of those who "*speak evil of whatever they do not know*" (2 Pt 2:12; Jd 10). Paul and Peter spoke these words of apostate Christians who had left the truth to follow after the imaginations of men. The lack of biblical knowledge in the religious world has laid a fertile bed for confusion on the study of the Holy Spirit. One of the major differences between the church and religious religion has been the church's view of the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man. Guy N. Woods was right when he stated,

One of the **major differences** between New Testament Christianity and the doctrine of denominationalism is the manner or mode of the Spirit's influence, i.e., whether the Holy Spirit, by direct impact upon the heart, and independent of the

Word, leads and directs; or, whether such influence is affected by means of the Word of Truth.<sup>4:1</sup>

As with the Israelites who gave up a knowledge of God, many Christians have become increasingly less Bible-oriented. Bible study in order to allow God to communicate to the human mind has become less emphasized. As a result, there is a greater dependence on what a particular preacher or teacher believes on a subject than what one has studied for himself. The problem with this is that when the individual Christian loses his or her biblical foundation of the revealed word in what is believed, he or she will seek for authority and knowledge in other areas than the Bible. The fact is that today too many have lost their dependence on the Bible in their search for something more than what God has promised the believer.

True Christian fellowship must be based upon a common acceptance and obedience to fundamental truths of the word of God. The audience to which the apostle John wrote was struggling with concepts concerning the incarnation of Jesus. The letter of his instructions of 1 John was vital to be received by those to whom he first wrote and to us. These inspired instructions were the foundation upon which we join in fellowship with one another and God. He wrote, "... *that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us* [apostles]; *and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 Jn 1:3). We must never forget that the only foundation for

fellowship in Christianity is established upon the truth of the revealed will of God. Therefore, when it comes to a study of the Holy Spirit, we must base our beliefs firmly upon what has been revealed. Our foundation of fellowship must be objective truths that we learn in the Bible, not the subjective feelings that we may assume are from the Holy Spirit.

If Christian fellowship digresses to a foundation that is simply based on close friends who are in search of something outside the realm of God's revelation, then the church digresses to being a social club. The more the members of this social club depend primarily on one another for strength and encouragement, the less they will depend on the word of God as their primary foundation of belief and behavior. Once the religious social club forsakes the authority of the word of God, they seek for nudges and inclinations directly from God in order to reaffirm the foundation of their beliefs. The more the group leans toward the nudges, the further it leans away from the truth. And *"because they did not receive the love of the truth ... God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie ..."* (2 Th 2:9-11). On the other hand, true Christianity has a close fellowship among members, but this fellowship is based on the truth of God's word.

We live in a religious world that has grown up on an ignorance of the word of God. We live in a world where "church" means a religious club of friends who assemble on a weekly basis to pacify religious consciences. The biblical interpre-

tations of those in this religious world, their traditions and their mysticism, have been recorded in a host of books in reference to the Holy Spirit. I am always suspect of such material because it comes from authors who do not have a respect for the authority of the Bible in religious matters. I am suspicious of those writings that come from the hands of those who cannot understand the simplicity of the Scriptures when they speak of coming into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through obedience to the gospel in immersion. This may signal a lack of objectivity on my part. On the other hand, I am suspicious of the books of any religious group that refuses to submit to the word of God in all practice and belief. However, this does not mean that there is a lack of truth in such books. I will accept truth from any source. It does mean that as in eating fish, we must eat the meat and spit out the bones. The only way we can determine what is meat or bones is by the judgment of the word of God. Therefore, those who do not know the word of God would do well to caution themselves in their reading of religious literature.

I ask you to do the same in reference to my interpretations concerning the Holy Spirit. At this point in my studies, I am sure there are still a few bones here and there. In later studies, I will discover those bones. You may see them as you read through this book. However, as long as we both agree that the Bible is the final authority, then we will remain on the same course.

## **B. Hindered by a lack of studious responsibility:**

Anyone who has studied with religious individuals and groups who are charismatic in their belief, will often come across those who have forsaken the word of God. I once had in my office a preacher of a charismatic church who was told by some in his congregation not to preach the Bible. He was encouraged to allow the “Spirit” to speak through him. I was once handing out enrollment forms in Botswana in order to encourage people to enroll in a Bible correspondence course study. One lady said, “We do not need the Bible. We have the Holy Spirit to tell us what to do.”

Many people have terminated their studies of the Bible because they believe that the Holy Spirit will directly teach them what they must know. Bible study has become a casual exercise of scanning the pages of the Bible as a Sunday morning newspaper. Bible classes have digressed to non-challenging surveys of proof texts that only touch the high points of biblical revelation. Sermons have digressed to after-dinner speeches that please the ears of those who have casually checked in at the club to keep their membership current. Some preachers carry on with emotion rampages that excite members, but leave them void of any message from the Bible. Members have thus been choked on milk while starving for the meat of the word.

Out of this social-club or emotional oriented Christianity has arisen a new god that we have created after our own im-

age. It is a god who has been created after our emotions. This new god “suggests.” He does not **command**. He says that it is OK to be ignorant of the Bible. It is OK not to take Bible study seriously. It is OK to forsake one’s responsibility to be totally submitted to divine revelation. This new god speaks, “If it feels right, it is right.”

This movement of emphasis for authority in emotions and feelings has led to a change from a focus on obeying what the Bible commands to “allowing the Spirit to work in one’s life.” Our feelings take the place of God’s word. This is a subtle shift. It is slow and deceiving. Nevertheless, it is real. After one turns away from serious Bible study, he seeks for another guiding influence in his life to direct the frustrations of his religious inclinations. Emotionally driven Bible students often search for an easy way to spirituality that does not depend on a diligent study of the Bible which God intended should be the source of faith (Rm 10:17).

The religiosity of the charismatic “believer” often leads him away from the authority of biblical revelation. The Bible is subjected to emotions and feelings instead of our emotions and feelings being subject to the Bible. Since the Holy Spirit supposedly gives truth directly to us today, then there is no need for Bible study. What has actually happened in the charismatic religious phenomenon that we see today is an attack against the authority of the word of God. It is not only an attack against the word of God, it is a total negligence of the word of God in religious matters.

When one rejects submission to God that is based on the conditions which Deity assigns for salvation, then he seeks to move the responsibility of faithfulness to something else. Here is the subtle move of one's responsibility from study, knowledge and submission to the Bible to "allowing the Spirit to work directly in one's life." Once one makes this shift and goes wrong, then who gets the blame? "Why did you, Holy Spirit, not do more to make me right?" It has gone to the extent of changing from "the devil made me do it" to "the Spirit did not help me do it enough or better."

There is a unique problem in churches where there is a great ignorance of the Bible and a tremendous emphasis on the direct work of the Spirit in one's life. When these churches do go wrong, they have trouble in discovering the source of the trouble. In truth it was not the devil that made them go wrong. According to their theology, it was the Spirit that did not do enough to make them do right. The fact is that those who do go wrong in some way have simply refused to subject their lives to the commandments of God, the revealed truth in the Bible. One must not fail to recognize that he or she is responsible to the word of God. Remember Jesus' words? "*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (Jn 12:48). If we go wrong, we can blame only ourselves for not submitting to the word of God. When we stand in judgment, we cannot blame the devil. We will not be able to blame the Spirit. The

burden of judgment will rest squarely upon our own shoulders.

### C. Hindered by narrow Bible study principles:

I have often heard of those who approach their study of the Holy Spirit by reading all the passages in the Bible that mention the Spirit. Though this may be a worthy effort, this approach to understanding any Bible subject is far from adequate. This type of approach to understanding the Bible often leads to a distorted view of biblical teachings simply because one's knowledge of a subject is based on proof texts. A proof text knowledge of any Bible subject is often out of context. When one does not consider the context in which any passage is listed, he or she will often read into the passage preconceived ideas. This method of Bible study originated from a "proof text" system of biblical interpretation that has led to much confusion, not only in other Bible subjects, but specifically in the area of understanding what the Bible teaches concerning the subject of the Holy Spirit.

When studying any Bible subject, one must move from a proof text interpretation of God's word to a **context**, and then a **whole text** understanding of what is being taught on any subject. This is very critical in a study of the Holy Spirit. If one researches only passages that mention the Holy Spirit, then he has neglected the Spirit's work in other areas as revelation, inspiration and miraculous works. It is vital that one approach a study of the Holy Spirit from an under-



standing of the entire biblical context on the matter. **The better one understands the specifics of God’s work among man and the material world by better understanding the whole of His work.** In fact, it is often difficult to understand the specifics without first understanding the generics. One cannot understand the parts without first understanding the whole. And in order to understand the whole of the work of the Spirit, it is necessary to have a general view of the work of God among men.

An example to illustrate the preceding point would be our understanding of the purpose of the miraculous gifts in the early church. There are nine miraculous gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. If we do not understand the general purpose of the miraculous gifts that were invested in the Christians of the first century, then we will not be able to understand the specific gifts themselves. Charismatic churches focus on the gift of languages (tongues). This gift was not given in order that the one who possessed it might entertain himself and others. It was not given for the purpose of manifesting some spiritual awakening of the individual. It was given for evangelistic and edification reasons. If we do not understand that the miraculous gifts were to solidify and establish the early church until the coming of the written word of God, then we will not be able to understand the gifts. (More on this later.)

#### **D. Hindered by changing the focal point of Christianity:**

In some religious groups, the Holy Spirit has become the center of attraction. He has been made so central in these groups that the worshipers have almost forgotten the One who is to be the center of attention in Christianity. The colorful assemblies of charismatic churches are often conducted in order to seek the Spirit instead of glorifying the Savior. Franklin Camp was right when he said the following concerning those religious groups that glorify the Spirit over Christ:

It has always been a mystery to me why it was Christ who became incarnate, suffered the mockery of men, died the ignoble death on the cross, and then the Holy Spirit should end up getting the glory and the honor. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, not himself.<sup>5:263</sup>

It was the work of the Spirit to give glory to the Christ. He did not come to seek glory for Himself. Even the word that He spoke He did not claim to be His own. Jesus said of the Spirit’s work, “... **what ever He hears He will speak ... He will glorify Me**” (Jn 16:13,14). In the revelation of all truth the Spirit did not assume to be the source of truth. It was His work to glorify the One who is now on the throne. Jesus is now on the throne. It has been the work of the Holy Spirit since the ascension of Jesus to glorify Jesus. Any church that does not focus on the Christ who is on the throne is not the church of Christ.

The Spirit has revealed much in the

word about Himself. He has been clear in most areas. He has been especially clear in those areas where He affects our lives. One might ask that if God revealed so much about the Spirit, then why would He leave man to guess about supposedly mystical influences of the Spirit that some claim are most important to our Christian living? I believe that God through the Spirit did not stop short in His explanation of the work of the Spirit that is important for us to understand concerning His work in our lives. What we must know about the Spirit's work is revealed. How He works in an indirect way in the world may be difficult for us to understand. However, we should not be perplexed about the work of God in the world. We must simply know that He works. *"How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"* (Rm 11:33).

It is not a lack of either knowledge or faith to not understand all that God the Spirit does among the saints. We would have to be God in order to understand all that the Spirit does. However, when we understand the purposes for which God worked in a miraculous manner, then we understand that when these purposes were fulfilled He ceased to work in a manner that we would define as "miraculous.". But this does not mean that He has ceased to work. Simply because I do not perceive the work of God as I would perceive His direct work in miraculous manner, does not say that God has ceased to work in our lives. It simply means that He now works behind the scenes or beyond the limits of my sense perceptions

in order to work all things together for the good of those who love Him.

The problem comes when men seek for more than what God has promised. This is the crucial mistake many religious people have made because they have forsaken a knowledge of the word of God as their foundation of faith. They seek a quick fix for faith by calling on the Holy Spirit to bless them with faith, when at the same time the Spirit has already said that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rm 10:17).

### **E. Hindered by cultural-religious background and environment:**

It is in this area of study that Bible students often make an unfortunate error in Bible study principles. The error is that religious ideas, accepted beliefs and surrounding experiences of today are often read into the Bible. In other words, one often interprets the Bible by the accepted interpretation or experience of the religious environment in which he or she lives.

We live in a world of religious confusion. In this world of confusion, interpreters often find it difficult to objectively study the Bible. Religious confusion has led to confusing interpretations of the Bible that make little sense. These confusing interpretations have often frustrated people into believing that the Bible cannot be consistently understood. This is especially true in the area of studies that deal with the New Testament teachings concerning the Holy Spirit. H. Leo Boles was right when he wrote,

Many minds are so cluttered with the useless rubbish and plunder of traditions and superstitions that it is difficult for them to understand and appreciate the New Testament teaching on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They have been taught by religious leaders that in some mysterious way the Holy Spirit operates independent of the instrumentality of the truth. They have never learned that the Holy Spirit uses the truth of God, the gospel, in regeneration and in sanctification; that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians through the truth of God, and that he leads people by speaking to them through the gospel as revealed in the New Testament.<sup>6:238</sup>

We must never underestimate the influence of tradition on biblical interpretation. It is the tendency of the prejudiced biblical interpreter to read into the Bible his past learning and past experiences. Everyone does this to some extent. However, one must be aware of this danger, and thus be on guard not to read unbiblical historical interpretations into the text of the Bible. We must seek to allow the Bible to speak for itself. We must interpret the Bible from the historical and cultural context in which it was first written. We must not interpret it from our own context.

There are numerous examples of how men in the religious world have violated the principle that the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself and interpret itself. One example is the practice of sprinkling for baptism. If one has been taught and believes that the correct mode of bap-

tism is by sprinkling, then every time he or she reads the word “baptism” in the New Testament the concept of sprinkling will come to mind. The same is true concerning “infant baptism.” When the prejudiced interpreter reads cases of household baptisms, he or she assumes that infants were baptized. The psychological phenomenon of ecstatic utterances or gibberish is often read into the New Testament wherein reference is made to speaking in tongues (languages). Thus this practice of high emotional ecstasy is read into the Bible to refer to the coming of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

The preceding examples of **reverse interpretation** have caused a host of misinterpretations concerning studies of the Holy Spirit. This is especially true concerning the influence of the sixteenth century theologian John Calvin and his world view in theology that has affected many religious groups throughout the world. His influence is often referred to today as Calvinism.

One must not underestimate the influence of John Calvin on the religious world. His teachings permeate the basic world view theology of numerous denominational groups, specifically the Baptist, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed and Methodist. Though John Calvin had many good things to say, his theology was flawed in the sense that he taught that individuals were predestined by God to either heaven or hell. This fatal error in his theology denied the free-moral agency of man, and thus attacked the justice of God. In this attack on the free-

moral agency of man and the justice of God, Calvin misunderstood the work and influence of the Holy Spirit. In relation to the work and operation of the Holy Spirit, Calvin assumed that a direct operation was necessary in order to stimulate men to respond to God.

In reference to the free-moral will of man, Calvin taught that as a result of the fall of man in the garden of Eden, man was corrupted in soul and spirit. He was corrupted in the sense that he could not free-morally respond to the will of God. As a result, a “sinful nature” was handed down through the seed of Adam, and thus, all men are now cursed with a “sinful nature” that makes it impossible for one to free-morally respond to the will of God. Because of man’s sinful nature, Calvin taught that man is totally depraved. The depraved nature of man makes it impossible for him to respond to the call of God through word of revelation. In other words, man cannot of his own free-will respond in obedience to the word of God in order to save his soul. Man is inclined to evil. Because of this inclination to evil, he is unable to please God by a free-moral response to biblical revelation. One cannot, therefore, respond to the gospel unless he is driven to do so by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

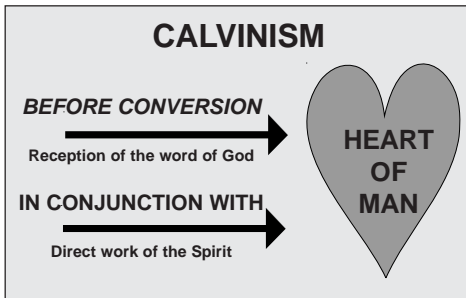
Calvinistic teaching of total depravity was the mother of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Calvinists’ teaching that the sinner was dead and could do nothing, called for the direct operation of the Spirit in conversion. This laid the

groundwork for the foolish claim of the Protestant world of the direct operation of the Spirit.<sup>5:1</sup>

Because of the belief in total depravity, the Calvinist called in the Holy Spirit to work directly on the heart of man. Harper wrote, “The denominations taught that the ‘naked Holy Spirit’ was operating upon the ‘naked spirit of man’ with nothing between the Holy Spirit and man’s spirit; or as we sometimes refer to it, ‘heart’.”<sup>7:119</sup> As a result of this belief, Calvin proposed that God had to send the Holy Spirit to activate directly or bring to life the heard word of God in the mind and heart of man. Since the individual could not free-morally respond to the word, the Holy Spirit had to be sent to work **in conjunction with** the word in order to bring forth a response from the individual.

Calvin taught that in order for men to be saved they must hear the word of God. However, in order to respond to the word of God that is heard, one must be sent the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Calvin taught that the Spirit directly activated the individual to respond to the word in order to do that which is necessary to be saved. What Calvin was saying was that no individual could voluntarily act or obey in a manner that would lead to his salvation. No matter what one did in a good way, he or she could not free-morally respond to the will of God. God had to send the Spirit in order for our feeble cries for salvation to be heard and made effective in reference to the hearing and obedience of the word of God.

Calvin made the pleadings of man for salvation impotent without the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man. He took the power out of the appeal of the gospel message and placed it on the Holy Spirit to operate directly on the heart of the individual. He thus dulled the sword of the Spirit. He placed the Spirit in the position of determining whom He would move to respond to the word and whom He would not. In this way, he made the Spirit a respecter of persons, and thus, attacked the justice of God.



Many religious groups today have accepted the fundamental theology of Calvinism. They teach that **a response to God's law is not necessary in order to be saved.** They teach that a supposed "Spirit motivated emotional experience" is proof enough that one has been saved by the Spirit. Others say that the Spirit injects a "saving faith," and thus, sanctifies the sinner. The doctrine of "faith only" thus arises from such teachings. This is the belief that salvation is not dependent on any free-moral response of man in obedience to the preached word of God. In order for one to be saved, he must simply believe on Jesus and say some form of a "sinner's prayer," which

form or action of prayer is found nowhere in the entire Bible.

Calvin's theology was developed in relation to the state of the alien sinner, that is, the work of God in reference to saving the unbeliever. What has occurred in many churches is what we might refer to as an **extended Calvinism.** By this I mean that there are those who have rejected Calvin's teaching concerning the direct operation of the Spirit on the heart of man in conversion, but they have affirmed a direct operation of the Spirit **after** conversion on the heart of man. It is believed that the Christian functions by the direct operation of the Spirit on his heart. He spiritually grows as the Spirit directly develops the fruit of the Spirit in his behavior. Free-moral agency is laid aside while the Spirit takes control. It is affirmed by some that we do not need to study the Bible because the Spirit will "teach one all things" that are necessary. One does not need to depend on the Bible, because the Spirit will directly give faith and knowledge.

There are many religious groups who base their theology on the belief that the Holy Spirit directly enables and educates the Christian. It is believed that since the Spirit must **directly** move the heart of man before conversion to respond to the word of God, He must also work **directly** on the heart of man **after** conversion in order for man to continue to respond to the word of God.

In this Calvinistic doctrine of the **direct, immediate, miraculous operation** of the **Holy Spirit's Person** within the lost man

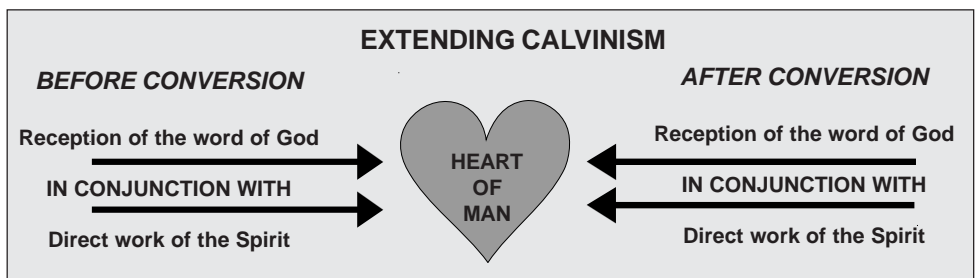
and **also** the **Christian**, the **Holy Spirit** **did something for the sinner and for the Christian that God demanded of them both in order for them to be saved – something that both the saint and sinner** find themselves **unable** to perform. **Here our** groups join hard and fast to the **Calvinistic** teaching that the Holy Spirit is **having to move in and do for God’s child** that which God’s child **cannot** do.<sup>7:9</sup>

Many religious groups today teach this “extended Calvinism” concerning the work of the Spirit in the Christian life. They affirm that the Spirit activates, enlightens, energizes, aids biblical interpretation, and brings to life the heart of man in relation to the word of God. But is this a biblical definition of the work of the Holy Spirit? We must determine if the relationship of the Spirit in the life of a Christian is so direct as to subjectively change his heart to conform to the will of God. If this is true, then every Christian must seek for this operation of the Spirit.

The significance of this study cannot be overemphasized. If the Spirit does operate directly, then we must deal with the problems that were presented by Noel Meredith in the following statement:

We note the following objections to a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner’s heart. (1) If the Holy Spirit operates in a direct way, apart from the Word, why are there no Christians in some areas? (2) If the Spirit operates directly on some, and not on others, God becomes a respecter of persons. (3) No one in the New Testament ever prayed for a direct, miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit. (4) If men are converted without the Word of God today, how are we to distinguish between the claims of so many contradictory groups who claim to have the Spirit? (5) If the Holy Spirit operates and converts separate from the Word of God, how can we be judged by the word in the last day? (6) A direct operation takes away personal responsibility and accountability. (7) A direct operation of the Holy Spirit would violate the freedom of choice which God has given to all men.<sup>13:215</sup>

Christians in many areas have been highly influenced by the theological philosophy of John Calvin. Ignorance of God’s word concerning teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit has led the way for the infiltration of such teaching. Christians’ refusal to dig deep into and



accept fundamental biblical teaching on the work of the Spirit has led many to accept a Calvinistic philosophy of the nature of man in relation to the operation and work of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that I ask for your patient consideration of some thoughts that will challenge the belief of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the individual in a manner that supposedly subjects the individual to a miraculous spiritual change. We must consider these thoughts in reference to the word of God, for it is the Spirit-inspired word that must be the dictionary as to how the Spirit works.

#### **F. Hindered by the intimidation of the majority:**

There are those who believe that the majority determines the truth on matters of interpretation. Though this is often not actually stated, in reality it is practiced. As a result, intimidation and biased “scholarship” form theological camps which are pitted against one another. The force of religious intimidation is freely exercised by those who voice derogatory statements and cutting remarks against those with whom they disagree. In this atmosphere, scholarship is often sacrificed in order that individuals defend camps of belief within theological circles. One’s beliefs are thus determined by the particular position of the camp wherein he has pitched his tent. And so with passion different camps launch battle against one another in order that positions be maintained. Harper

was right when he stated, “This Holy Spirit error is based upon feelings and emotions and when these two become hysterically motivated, all reason flies out the windows of our souls, and like a stampede of cattle, there is no reasoning with them.”<sup>7:183</sup>

An example of the above is the heated battle over the subject of the “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit. There are those in one camp who have affirmed that there is a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian. Those in another camp have affirmed that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian through the medium of the word of God. Back and forth this particular debate has carried on throughout the restoration movement. The Bible certainly speaks of an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Though there will always be discussion concerning how the Spirit indwells, all will agree that the Spirit has an indwelling relationship with the believer that He does not have with the unbeliever. In those areas wherein the Spirit works, it seems practical to assume that we should be cautious in maintaining positions that deal with the work and presence of God. It is certain that we do not understand all things that pertain to the Spirit’s presence, neither do we understand everything concerning His work.

Great biblical scholars in the past did not settle the issue on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I do not think that the discussion is over on this subject. It should never be over. When a teaching is accepted without continued investigation, stagnation sets in. Traditional in-

terpretations become the accepted position. We then slip off into becoming another one of a host of denominations who have followed the route of apostasy that accepts the traditions of the fathers. This is why the church must always cultivate an atmosphere of love in disagreement. Objective discussion must be lovingly nourished in an environment that is free from any pressures for belief other than the Scriptures. If we do not guard scholarship that is based on loving discussion, we will become intellectually stagnant in our relationship to the word of God. When we think we have established the truth on a matter, we will wake up one day and discover that we are defending positions and not the Bible. It is for this reason that we must continue to promote healthy discussion concerning the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In any discussion on those matters that refer to the work and existence of God we must not intend to settle the discussion. Discussion on the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit will always be needed. Therefore, in this book I do not intend to expose a final settlement on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. I will assuredly fall short of doing that for which I have set out to do. Nevertheless, I will strive to be objective and biblical. I will also strive not to be “so much” influenced by our present religious environment and background. Therefore, bear with me as I open the Holy Writ in order to see what God has revealed to us concerning the Holy Spirit. Brents expressed my sentiments when he said,

The divine volume contains many lessons on the subject [of the Holy Spirit], and surely our Father would not have said so much to us on a subject of which he intended us to remain entirely ignorant. We are, therefore, encouraged to pursue our study of the sacred pages with all the assistance we can get, in the hope that we may, at least, acquire a sufficient knowledge of what is taught concerning the Holy Spirit, to enable us to enjoy its comforting influences in God’s appointed way.<sup>8:572</sup>

It is thus imposed on every brother in Christ to nurture an atmosphere for discussion within an environment of brotherly love. When scholarship works in an atmosphere wherein theological intimidation is absent, great discussions are encouraged. Opposing parties feel free to express views and reap from the studies of others. When loving discussion prevails, those within the forum of discussion can mold their thoughts around new understandings of the Bible without having to become defensive in the heat of some battle. An atmosphere of loving discussion is particularly needed in studies concerning the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Since this is often an emotional issue, those who engage themselves in discussions on this subject need to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

### **G. Hindered by belief in mystic notions:**

Animism is the belief that one’s life



is supposedly directed by the nudges of spirits—particularly evil spirits—that surround the individual in his daily walk of life. The animist believes that certain rocks, sticks and other material objects have become the dwelling place of spirits. Spirits float through the air and take up residence in physical objects. If one stumbles over a stone, it is believed that the spirit of that stone is directing, or misdirecting, the one who stumbles. As a result of the stumble, it is believed that the one who stumbles should walk in another direction or take a different path. Some in the Christian world believe in a similar type of animism. I would refer to this as neo-animism. By neo-animism I am referring to **a belief that one is subject to outside forces that give him nudges and notions concerning his direction of life.**

In the world of Christendom there seems to be an obsession among some concerning demons. It is believed that demons are the cause of every evil happening from a common cold to unfortunate deaths. The adherents of this neo-animism walk a road of paranoia, constantly fearing the encroachment into their lives by some wandering demon. Instead of focusing on the love by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified, these paranoid religionists fear demons wherever they turn. There is no difference between this misguided religiosity than the animist who fears evil spirits in rocks and trees of an African forest.

We thus live in a world today that is neo-animistic. This is a modern-day ani-

mism that has worked itself into the religious world under the umbrella of “Christianity.” The animist believed there were many spirits moving about searching for material objects to indwell in order to communicate with men. In a similar manner, the neo-animist believes that demons go about in search of ways to nudge believers into following their will. Though it is not believed that the Holy Spirit actually indwells material objects, the concept of mystical nudges is the same in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. Negative happenings in one’s life are often accredited to the Spirit’s efforts to change our course of life. For example, if a preacher has an automobile accident on the way to a gospel meeting, some assume that it was not God’s will that he go to the meeting. Instead of accrediting such misfortunes to a violation of natural law or poor driving on the part of the preacher, we often give the Spirit credit for bad things that happen in our lives.

We live in this type of religious world, a world that gives the Spirit credit for doing everything and anything that cannot be explained. As people are converted from a world of mysticism and distorted understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit, all sorts of teachings concerning the Spirit find their way into the church. In churches where there is little study of the Holy Spirit, such teachings often prevail in the church. Such teachers of misguided beliefs are prevalent in the religious world in groups wherein they cannot be challenged by the biblically ignorant.

Where we stand on the subject of the

Holy Spirit affects many teachings of the Bible. For this reason it is essential to have a clear view of the Spirit from a biblical perspective. Over a century ago, Alexander Campbell wrote,

Experience has most abundantly shown, that essential error on this point has always been followed by fatal results on the whole scope of Christian doctrine and life, —so intimately is the Holy Spirit’s presence, nature, and work interwoven with every part of Christian truth.

Hence, it comes to pass that a man’s views of the Holy Spirit,—if he be logically consequent, which is not always the case,—are a good indication or test of his general religious belief; at least, if he be radically unsound here, it can scarcely be that he is not radically unsound in other essential matters.<sup>15</sup>

We must never underestimate the influence of culture upon our religious beliefs. This is especially true in reference to our religious culture. We might affirm that we must speak where the Bible speaks and be silent when it is silent. However, this is easier said than done. Because of the nature of the work of the Spirit, I would say that our understanding of the Spirit’s nature and work are greatly influenced by our religious culture. We might also say that our concept of the Spirit is greatly influenced by our **reaction** to our culture.

Generally speaking, I have observed that in cultures that promote a mystical concept in religious belief and practice,

those converted from such influences have formulated a very “conservative” view of the work of the Spirit. In reaction to mysticism, these new converts often rebel against mysticism to the point of denying the mystery of God who works in ways that are past finding out. But we must not so react against our past. It is still the objective of the new convert to base his faith on the word of God. New converts must not in conversion react to their culture, and thus swing to an unbiblical position of deism, that is, a belief in a God who in no way works in our world.

There is also the situation that religionists in industrial cultures often develop a mystical concept of the Spirit’s work as a reaction against the unfulfilled or emotionally cold results of materialistic logic and systematic scientism. The industrial culture of materialism cannot fulfill hopes of future life. The culture utterly fails to fulfill man’s deepest spiritual inclinations. When one is converted to Christianity in these cultures, there is again an unbalanced swing to a radical position. In a search for spiritual guidance while swinging in reaction from unspiritual materialism and scientism, individuals too often swing past biblical revelation to engulf themselves in the mystical world of the occult. When one in this culture converts to Christianity, a mystical concept of the work of the Holy Spirit is often developed.

In all the swings of emotion that one goes through in conversion, he must be urged to firmly plant his feet upon the foundation of the word of God. It alone

must determine our understanding of the Spirit. Our understanding of the Spirit must not be determined in reaction to our cultural upbringing. We must allow the Spirit to speak for Himself as He reveals

through the inspired word of God His being and work. Though we may not understand everything, we know He is there.

## Chapter 2

### The Person Of The Holy Spirit

In any study of the Holy Spirit, it is first necessary to define some basic concepts and words by which we communicate with one another on this subject. A clear understanding of these concepts will greatly aid our understanding of scriptures that are related to the Holy Spirit. A common understanding of definitions will also guard against confusion that often arises in discussions on this subject.

Much of the misunderstanding in studies concerning the work of the Holy Spirit actually lies in a misunderstanding of some fundamental Bible teachings concerning the justice of God, the nature of man, the occurrence of the miraculous and the person of the Holy Spirit. Once we come to a better understanding of these fundamental teachings, we can better understand the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit.

In chapters three through seven are set forth fundamental concepts that must lay the foundation for our study of the work of the Spirit. The chapters are a study of the justice of God, the free-moral agency of man, the work of the inspired word of God, the miracles of God, and the providence of God. Though only a

brief study is made of these subjects, it is important to first consider these subjects before studying the Spirit's work. If one does not have a clear understanding of these fundamental principles, he will certainly arrive at some erroneous conclusions concerning the work of the Spirit.

We must also approach a study of the Scriptures from our cultural background. We are cultural beings, and thus, when we study any material of the Bible, our culture will affect how we understand what we read. Because of this, we will often view the work of the Spirit from the standpoint of our past and present religious culture. Therefore, our religious culture will often lead us to come to different conclusions because we have come out of different cultural backgrounds. However, regardless of our culture, we must seek to allow the Bible to speak for itself. We must subjugate our religious culture and beliefs to the authority of the Bible. We must do this, not only to objectively understand what the Bible teaches concerning the Holy Spirit, but also to maintain the fundamental teaching of the Bible that brethren remain united.

As we launch into the biblical definitions of the Spirit and His work, I would also like to remind you again that we will never come to a complete understanding of the Spirit and His work. As I stated before, we would have to be God in order to fully understand God and His work. Therefore, we must not frustrate ourselves by our lack of understanding concerning those things that pertain to God. God knows our frustrations. The Holy Spirit does not expect us to understand everything about His being and work. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will carry on with what He intends to do for the sake of the Christian regardless of our lack of knowledge and understanding. We must remember that the level of our understanding does not determine the level of work the Spirit does in our lives. If it did, the Spirit would certainly be hindered in all of our lives. Because of our lack of knowledge and understanding concerning a God who is past finding out by the feeble efforts of man, the Holy Spirit simply reassures us that He will do His work without our complete understanding of how He works.

### A. The “person” of the Holy Spirit:

Any attempt to comprehend God by use of our human dictionary will surely end in frustration. There is too much baggage hanging on our words. Our words are too earthly. Struggling to use earthly defined words to define that which is spirit, is certainly a challenge that is faced by every biblical interpreter. Therefore, when reading the following

“definitions”, keep in mind that I am using words of this world that often carry with them earthly definitions in our minds. We thus caution ourselves in making any definition of God by using our dictionary.

In any study of the Holy Spirit, we must seek to understand what the Bible teaches concerning the “**person**” of the Spirit. By “person” we mean the individual identity or nature of the Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is a person of the eternal *Elohim*. This Hebrew word for God is plural in its use in Genesis 1:1. This God created the heavens and earth. When God (plural) said, “*Let Us make man ...*” (Gn 1:26), the Holy Spirit was a part of the eternal **Us** that formed man from the dust of the earth. The use of the word “Us” assumes that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want us to understand that God works as one, but are three in function. What is beyond our understanding is that the one true God both works and manifests Himself as a plurality. This does not mean that there are three Gods. It simply means that the one God could have manifested Himself in many different persons in order to carry out His work and function.

The word “Godhead” is used three times in the *King James Version* to translate either *to theios* or *theiotes*, which Greek words are used in reference to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Acts 17:29 the word “Godhead” is used to translate *to theios* which is translated by other versions with the English words “divine nature” (NKJV), “divine being” (NIV) or “Deity” (RSV). The word

“Godhead” is used to translate *theiotes* in Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9. The word *theiotes* refers to the attributes, nature and properties of God. The nature or “property” of God is His plurality. This has confused Bible students for centuries, and thus we must not think that we can fully understand that to which the inspired writer is referring. One would simply have to be a God in order to fully understand the nature of God.

Biblical revelation, however, does identify three “personalities” or persons of the Godhead, though the words “personality” and “person” as we use them here should not be understood to refer to **different natures** in person or personality. The Godhead is precisely the same in character and nature. There is no difference between the character and nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, the Godhead manifests Himself as three. Paul stated, “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all*” (2 Co 13:14). In this one statement Paul mentions three, the Lord Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit. This manifestation of three was also revealed at the baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17). Jesus, the Son, was baptized in water **on earth**. The Holy Spirit **descended on Him** in the likeness of a dove. But the Father spoke **from heaven**.

Though the Scriptures teach that there is one God (Dt 4:35; 6:4,5; Is 43:10,11; 46:8-11), the one God can be manifested to be in three different “places” in reference to this world. On earth, Stephen was filled with the Holy

Spirit, but saw in vision the Son at the right hand of the Father (At 7:55-59). There are numerous other statements that manifest this distinctiveness in the Godhead (See Mt 12:28,32; Jn 11:41; 15:26; 20:17; 1 Tm 2:5). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is a distinct entity of the eternal Godhead in the sense that He has a specific work. He is not distinct in a sense of being separate. He simply has a distinctive work..

It may seem to the novice interpreter or new convert that our struggle to “define” God, and specifically the Holy Spirit, with the words of man is a confusing ordeal in linguistic gymnastics. This may be true. Our inability to understand how God can be three and yet one does not communicate to our human intellect. Nevertheless, this is how God has manifested Himself to us, and thus, we must be satisfied with our intellectual inadequacies to fully understand.

## B. The personality of the Holy Spirit:

Personality refers to things as emotions and feelings. We define our personality by the way we respond to others. Therefore, when we seek to explain the personality of the Spirit, we are explaining His personality after the characteristics of our own personality behavior. As an eternal personality, the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ep 4:30), vexed (Is 63:10), lied to (At 5:3), resisted (At 7:51; 1 Th 5:19), despised (Hb 10:29), blasphemed and sinned against (Mt 12:31,32; Mk 3:28,29). All these things are done to a personality that can feel the

sin of man. If the Spirit was an impersonal entity, then these human reactions against the Spirit as explained in Scripture would make no sense. The fact that the Spirit is a being with emotion is verified in the fact that man can sinfully work against those emotions. The Holy Spirit, therefore, responds to our sin in a manner that we should respond to our own sinful situation.

### C. The gender of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal "it." Though Deity has no gender in the sense of male and female, the **masculine gender** is used in the Bible to refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus said to the apostles, "**He** [the Holy Spirit] *will teach you all things ...*" (Jn 14:26). "**He** *will testify of Me*" (Jn 15:26). "... **He** *will speak and He* *will tell you all things ...*" (Jn 16:13). Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome concerning the Spirit, "**He** *who searches the hearts ... He* *makes intercession ...*" (Rm 8:27). The Spirit said in Antioch, "*Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (At 13:2). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is not an impersonal influence. He is not a mystic force or ghostly nudge floating through the air. He is "person" or "personality" in the masculine gender as the Father and Son.

### D. The eternal attributes of the Holy Spirit:

In Acts 5:3 Ananias and Sapphira **lied to the Holy Spirit**. However, in verse 4

it is said that they lied to God. The Holy Spirit is God, and when one lies to the Spirit, he lies to God the Holy Spirit (Gn 1:1,26). The Spirit is of the eternal Godhead who existed before the creation of the material world (Jb 26:13; Hb 9:14). The Spirit is not a minor God who is inferior to the Father and Son. All the nature we would attribute to the Father and Son we must also attribute to the Holy Spirit (See Mc 3:8; Rm 8:26,27; 1 Co 2:10-13).

The Holy Spirit manifests the same divine characteristics as God. The Spirit is omniscient (all-knowing) in that He "*searches all things*" (1 Co 2:10). He is omnipresent in that one cannot escape His presence (Ps 139:7-10). The Spirit is mentioned in the presence of the eternal Father and Son (Mt 3:13-17; 28:19,20; 2 Co 13:14). Thus the Spirit is one with the Father and Son and shares the same eternal attributes as a part of God.

### E. The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the church:

The early disciples walked in the "*comfort of the Holy Spirit*" (At 9:31). This would manifest the nature of the Spirit. The Spirit is of a nature that can be close to man. His closeness is defined by indwelling in the Scriptures. He worked on behalf of Christians in prayer (Rm 8:26,27). He was close to the apostles as a "helper" in inspiration (Jn 14:26; 16:13). Such closeness emphasizes the individuality of the Spirit. We are in the time of the Holy Spirit where

it is the work of the Spirit to be in and with the church until the end. Therefore, the church has a unique relationship with the Holy Spirit that was not experienced before the coming of the Spirit at the beginning of the church.

#### F. The intellectual characteristics of the Holy Spirit:

When we speak of the intellect of the Spirit, we must assume that His intellect must condescend to what we know. The Spirit as God knows all things. The Holy Spirit “*knows the things of God*” (1 Co 2:11). He has a **mind** (Rm 8:27). He has **freedom of choice** in that He divided the miraculous gifts among those in the church according to His will (1 Co 12:11). He has the power of **searching** (1 Co 2:10), **loving** (Rm 15:30), and **witnessing** (Jn 15:26). All these characteristics manifest the intellectual nature of the Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit is not a “ghost” that is whispering from one place to another.

#### G. The specific work of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit has a specific work. His specific work identifies Him as a distinct manifestation of the Godhead. It was the specific work of the Spirit to bring order to the created world (Gn 1:2; Jb 26:13; Ps 104:30). It was the specific work of the Spirit to inspire men to speak and write Scripture (1 Co 2:10-13; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21). The Spirit also worked through Jesus during

the ministry of Jesus on earth (Mt 4:1; 12:28; Lk 4:14,18; Jn 3:34). It was the specific work of the Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). It was the work of the Spirit to work miraculously through the gifts of the Spirit (At 8:18; 1 Co 12-14; Hb 2:4). These works identify the individual manifestation of the Spirit in relation to the Godhead. In all His work it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus. Of Him, Jesus said, “*He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you*” (Jn 16:14).

These brief explanations of the identity of the Holy Spirit certainly fall short of what we would like to know about the Spirit. We struggle with the definitions of our dictionary in order to understand something that is beyond our definitions. Nevertheless, the Bible reveals enough about the Spirit’s identity to distinguish the Spirit from the spooks and ghosts that are often conjured up in the minds of men and read into the Bible.

The Spirit is God manifested in this time in order to carry out His specific work in reference to the church. Because of their background, some people feel comfortable to say that God is working among us today. Others, however, feel comfortable in saying that it is the Spirit working among us today. Regardless of how it is said, the Spirit is God, and thus, the Spirit as God is working among us. It is God the Spirit who is working all things together for the good of the Christian (Rm 8:28). It is God the Spirit who guards us from being tempted above what

we are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). When Jesus worked on earth, it was God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together through the manifestation of

Jesus of Nazareth. Now that the Spirit is working, it is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working through the Spirit for the benefit of the believer.

## Chapter 3

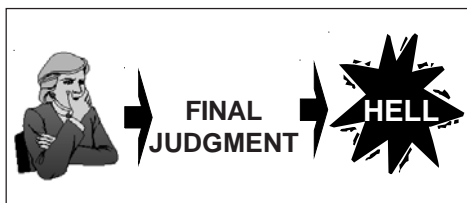
# The Justice Of God

One of the central teachings of the Bible in reference to the nature of God is His justice. Justice means that God deals justly with all men and does not show respect of persons. God is *“a just God and a Savior”* (Is 45:21). *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation”* of His throne (Ps 89:14). This is also said of the Son who said, *“My judgment is just”* (Jn 5:30-KJV). Jesus is the Just One (At 3:14; 7:52; 22:14).

God is a just God. To be just means to be fair. It means to judge by law with an unprejudiced nature. Judgment with justice means that the individual who is judged must have had opportunity to obey the law by which he is judged. He must also have had a choice to make a response to law. The one judging must not be swayed by preconceived ideas or respect of persons. The one who is judged must not have been given a nature that would incline him to either obey or disobey law. The justice of God means that God has bound Himself to fair judg-

ment by His law that He has given to free-moral man. It means that He will not interfere with the free-moral decisions of those who will be judged.

One's theology of the Holy Spirit must always look forward to the final judgment and the punishment of the wicked beyond the judgment. If one person is eternally lost, no accusation must be charged against God in judgment for being an unfair judge. This is especially true concerning the judgment of any Christian who loses his or her soul. Therefore, as we formulate our understanding of the work of the Spirit upon the moral behavior of man, we must guard the justice of God in final judgment. If one is eternally lost, God cannot be blamed. One must accept complete responsibility for his or her salvation in response to the word of God. Only in this way can the justice of God stand in view of the final judgment and condemnation of the wicked or apostate Christian.



### A. God is not a respecter of persons.

In order for the justice of God to stand unchallenged, **God must not show respect of persons.** Peter said, *“In truth I*



*perceive that God shows no partiality*" (At 10:34). He also stated, "... *the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work ...*" (1 Pt 1:17). Therefore, "*there is no partiality with God*" (Rm 2:11; see Ep 6:9; Cl 3:25). It is a clear Bible teaching that God does not show respect of persons in reference to judgment.

Since God does not work with respect of persons, then we must also conclude that He does not work on the heart of man in any way that shows partiality. He does not influence man against his will (subjectively) to either obey or disobey His word. In other words, in order for God to maintain His justice He cannot make you do what you do not want to do. He will not forcefully stop you from doing what you should not do. If He did, then He would be partial. He would be showing favoritism. And if one was eternally lost to which God had shown partiality in any way, then the justice of God would be brought under question. If one were condemned whom God had helped, then the condemned could complain that God did not help enough. If one is eternally lost, no fault can be placed on God for one's condemnation.

It is of vital importance to understand the principle that God is not a respecter of persons. There would be no such thing as the justice of God if God showed respect of persons. When drawing conclusions concerning the work and influence of the Holy Spirit, it is very important to understand that God the Holy Spirit works without showing respect of persons. He does not consider one saint

above another. He does not work in a manner by which He would eventually be accused of partiality when the apostate saint loses his soul.

## **B. God is bound to judgment by His own law.**

When speaking of the justice of God, two things are necessary. One is the presence of law. The other is that a free-moral agent must be truly free in order to respond to law.

**1. Law is necessary.** If God created man—and He did—then it is reasonable to conclude that He would communicate direction to man for moral behavior. If God created man a free-moral agent—and He did—it is of absolute necessity that man be given law in order to direct his behavior toward his fellow man. God did not make men gods. He did not create man with the ability to determine his own moral code. It is not in man to do such (See Jr 10:23). Man's efforts to direct his own life ends in his maltreatment of his fellow man. Nazi Germany and similar societies of world history have proved the fact that it is not in man to morally direct his own steps. Since man is here as a result of God's creation, it is necessary, therefore, that he be governed by divine law.

**2. Law must be revealed before final judgment.** In order for God to be just by not showing partiality in judgment, He must reveal law to man **before** he is held accountable for obedience to law. Men must have forewarning and op-

portunity to bring their lives into harmony with that which is required for salvation. Jesus stated, "... *the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (Jn 12:48). Jesus, therefore, has given His standard by which men will be judged. Men have been forewarned that they will be judged by this standard in order that they reap the eternal benefits of law.

If one stands condemned before God in the last day, then he of necessity had to have had law revealed to him before the judgment. God would certainly not be a just God if He condemned to hell anyone who had not been given law before judgment. Because God has given law, His judgment will be just.

**3. Law is necessary as a standard of judgment.** When we speak of the law of God in reference to Christians, we must keep in mind that law is the condition for a covenant relationship that the Christian has with God. In order to establish a covenant relationship with God, one must submit to the God-given conditions of the covenant. In order to maintain the covenant, the obedient must continue their submission to the conditions of the covenant. This does not mean that the conditions can be kept perfectly. The fact is that no one can keep the conditions of the covenant perfectly. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rm 3:9,10,23). Therefore, it is by grace we are saved (Rm 5:1,2). When considering the giving of law for men to obey, we must keep in mind that God expects us to respond to grace by obedience to the conditions of our covenant relationship with Him.

Law is given as the condition for covenant relationship. Therefore, law is necessary. It is necessary in order to determine if one has sought to keep the conditions of a covenant with God. This point is brought out in several places in Paul's letter to the Romans. He refers to this first in Romans 2. In Romans 2:2 Paul said, "*But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth [law] against those who practice such things.*" In this context Paul is arguing that God will judge the Jews by the Old Testament law. In final judgment He "*will render to each one according to his deeds*" (Rm 2:6; see 2 Co 5:10). The standard of judgment for the Jews would be the Old Testament law. In this judgment "*there is no partiality with God*" (Rm 2:11). Such impartial judgment is emphasized in verse 12. "*For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.*" For Christians, therefore, Paul concludes that God will "*judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel*" (vs 16). The Christian's standard of judgment by which his deeds will be measured will be the word of Christ. Jesus said, "... *the word that I have spoken will judge ...*" in the final day of judgment (Jn 12:48).

In Romans 3 Paul continued to emphasize the just judgment of God because He has given law to man. Paul asked, "*Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?*" (Rm 3:5). In other words, is God an unjust God who would condemn without law those He might randomly choose not to save? Paul's answer is, "*Certainly not!*"

(Rm 3:6). Paul assumes that the Romans, and us, would be wondering concerning God's final judgment. He continued, "*For how will God judge the world?*" (Rm 3:6). The answer is simple. "*The law brings about wrath*" (Rm 4:15). The law notifies man that he is a sinner. It manifests that no man can keep law perfectly in order to justify himself before God.

Through law men realize that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:23). Therefore, the law is good because it identifies sin. And when sin is identified, one is driven to the grace of God. It is man, not law, who has the problem. His problem is sin. Paul asks, "*Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law*" (Rm 7:7). Paul's extended answer is, "*Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*" (Rm 7:12). The law which was good simply identified sin, for "*when the commandment came, sin revived and I died*" (Rm 7:9). Therefore, we must not attack the law, or God's giving of law, if we are condemned in final judgment. The point is that we must accept personal responsibility for our own inability to keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves. Law makes us accept the responsibility of responding to the grace of God. In no way can God be blamed for our lack of response. His justice must and will go unchallenged throughout eternity because He has forewarned man by the giving of law and the offering of grace to those who have realized that they cannot be saved by perfect

obedience to law. Man's eternal destiny depends upon his response to the grace of God to keep the conditions (law) of the covenant which is offered to all men.

Judgment will be conducted according to God's revealed law. God cannot change the conditions of the covenant at the time of final judgment and still be just. He cannot judge individuals by a different law than that which was given. God is bound to judge by that law which He has given as the standard of final judgment.

**4. *The Holy Spirit must of necessity allow man the opportunity to freely act or react in relation to revealed law.*** Our understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit in relation to revealed law and the heart of man is very critical here. **God cannot stand just in final judgment if the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the heart of man in a manner wherein he would directly influence man's action or reaction to revealed law.** The apostate Christian could not be justly condemned if it were the work of the Spirit to directly influence his moral behavior in relation to the law. This is true because the apostate could **justly** say in his condemnation, "Why did the Spirit not influence me more?" If the Holy Spirit works directly on the heart of Christians in a manner by which He directly controls and changes the heart, then apostate Christians could blame the Holy Spirit for their condemnation.

Any teaching, therefore, that shifts the responsibility for condemnation from the apostate Christian to the work of the

Holy Spirit must be brought under question. In order for God to stand just in final judgment, no blame can be placed on Him in any way for the condemnation of the disobedient. The condemned must suffer the consequences of their disobedience. The only way that they can is that they had to have been totally responsible for their behavior.

The teaching of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the free-moral heart of man inherently makes God a respecter of persons. If God operates directly in conversion in order to move one to respond to the gospel, then this action makes God respect one sinner over another. Why would He not move all men to respond who hear the gospel? The fact that most do not respond to the preached gospel is evidence that the Holy Spirit is not operating directly in order to move men to respond to the gospel. If God works directly on the heart of the believer, the same dilemma is faced. We would ask why He operated powerfully in one case, and yet, in the case of the fallen Christian we would wonder why He did not work hard enough in order to guard the believer from falling. Harper was right when he said,

If God's child could obey God but would not, and God sends in the Holy Spirit to do his work, or to obey for him, or to **enable** his child to do it himself, you then place God under obligation to do the same for all his children or make God a respecter of persons. This would mean "once in grace always in grace"; "once saved, always saved" **unless** the Holy

Spirit is **unable** to perform that for which God sent him.<sup>7:11</sup>

God has revealed His law to man. We are subject to that law. We will in the last day be judged by that law (Jn 12:48). It is not the work of the Holy Spirit to endanger the justice of God by directly influencing our relationship to that law. It is not the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to respond to the gospel and law of God. It is our free-moral responsibility to obey. And after we obey the gospel, it is our responsibility to maintain the conditions of God's covenant which He establishes with us at the time of our obedience to the gospel. As a Christian in a covenant relationship with God, it is not the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to maintain the conditions of the covenant. It is our responsibility. And since it is our responsibility to maintain the conditions of the covenant, then it will be our responsibility if we do not continue faithful to those conditions. It will thus be our own fault if we lose our soul by falling away from the covenant we have with God. Every picture of the final judgment in the New Testament focuses on the individual responsibility of each person. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10). In our final judgment, we cannot blame any other person if we are lost. This also means that we cannot blame the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 4

# The Free-Moral Agency Of Man

Keep in mind that the justice of God is defined by the fact that there will be a final judgment wherein many will be condemned to an eternal hell. The fact that there will be accountability for sin, assumes that there must be a just God who will bring all men before judgment. Therefore, in order for there to be a just and fair judgment of all men, those who are judged must be fairly judged by a just God. This can happen only if man can be held completely accountable for his own behavior. And for man to be held completely accountable for his own behavior in final judgment, he must be truly free to make his own decisions in this life. This brings us to the ability for making choices that God has instilled within all men. In order for just judgment to be conducted in reference to every individual, every individual must be a truly free-moral agent who lives in an environment wherein choices between good and evil can be freely made.

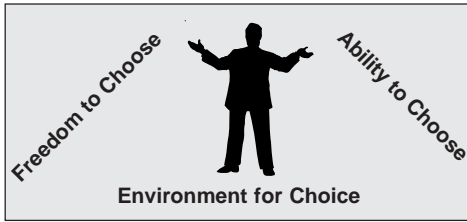
In order for God to be just in judgment, therefore, man must be a true **free-moral agent**. By **free** I mean that we must have the right or freedom to make choices of either good or evil. By **moral** I mean that we must have the freedom to make moral choices concerning our behavior that affects our conduct and eternal destiny. By **agent** I mean that we must be an independent personality that is not directly influenced by God on our

heart or mind to make either right or wrong choices. A truly free-moral agent has the freedom to make choices of either good or evil in an environment wherein choices of either good or evil can be made.

### A. Requirements for a free-moral agent:

In order for man to be a true free-moral agent, there are three things that must exist which are necessary in order for him to be truly free. He must have the ability to make choices. He must live in an environment in which the choices can be made. And, he must have the freedom to make the choices. If one had the ability to make choices, but did not live in an environment wherein he could make choices, then certainly he would not be a true free-moral individual. If he could make the choices and lived in an environment in which he could make choices, but was prevented from doing so, then he would still not be a truly free-moral individual.

**1. Ability to choose:** If we are to make choices in relation to revealed law in order to maintain a covenant relationship with God, we must have the **mental ability** to make those choices. God first placed man in the garden of Eden. He also placed in the garden the tree of the



knowledge of good and evil. In relation to the tree, there was law. “Don’t eat of it” (Gn 2:17). However, it would have been senseless to state the law concerning the eating of the fruit of the tree if man did not have the ability to make a rational choice concerning the law. Adam was given the law not to eat of the tree because God had already given him the ability to make a choice. Because Adam had the ability to make a choice in reference to law, he was truly free, and thus, would be held accountable for his sin if he ate. Therefore, in order for all men to stand in judgment and be held accountable for their choices, all of us must have been created with the ability to make choices concerning good and evil.

Condemnation of anyone would be unjust if individuals did not have the ability to make choices by which he or she could be saved. The justice of God will stand in judgment because we have been given the ability to make choices. And because we have this ability, we will be held accountable for the choices we make.

**2. *Environment for choice:*** A man with the ability to choose, who is not placed in an environment wherein he can make choices, is not truly free. Therefore, God had to place choices before

Adam and Eve in order to produce an environment wherein they could function as true free-moral agents. For this reason, man was placed in a world where Satan is allowed to deceive. The reality of these deceptions is evidence that we have to make choices in relation to truth. As free-moral agents we are capable of making decisions in the environment in which we live.

In order for God to stand as a just God in judgment, those who are judged must have had an opportunity to make choices of good or evil. If the condemned had not had the choice of making bad choices, then God could not be just to condemn them to hell. Therefore, the fact that we will be held accountable for making evil choices, assumes that we now live in an environment in which those choices can be made.

**3. *Freedom to choose:*** It would have been useless for God to create man with the ability to make choices, and then place him in an environment wherein choices could be made, without giving him the freedom to make choices. God’s creation of man with the ability to make choices assumes that he has the freedom to do so. Placing man in an environment wherein he could make choices, also assumes that man can make choices. Therefore, in order for man to be a true free-moral agent, he must have the privilege of making choices of either good or evil in an environment wherein such choices can be made.

If God had pre-programmed man to behave in a certain manner, he would be a robot. It is difficult to love a robot.

Therefore, in order for God to relate to a being upon which He could truly pour out His love, man of necessity had to be created truly free to make moral decisions. To be truly free, however, God could not create man with a programmed nature that would incline him to either good or evil. We were created pure. Babies are born pure of sin. We were brought forth into this world with an unbiased nature. Therefore, we are not programmed (predestined) to good and heaven. We are not programmed (predestined) to evil and hell. If we were programmed to good, we would not deserve heaven. If we were programmed to evil, we could not justly be condemned to hell. We had to be created pure and then allowed to live in an environment where freedom of choice was possible.

Without freedom of choice, we could not be justly given heaven as a “reward.” A reward can be given only to one who could have chosen to receive it. Neither could we be justly condemned to hell if we were not true free-moral agents with the freedom to rebel against God. What type of fiendish god would condemn to hell one who never had a choice for good nor possessed the freedom to exercise that choice?

## **B. The freedom of a free-moral agent:**

The Bible assumes that man is a free-moral agent. Free-moral agency is an axiomatic truth, that is, a truth that does not need direct revelation to teach or necessity of proof. It is simply a fact of life that all men have the freedom to make

choices. Therefore, we do not need to quote a scripture that states, “Man is a free-moral agent.” That man is such, needs no proof according to Scripture. Free-moral agency is true because man exercises daily choices in an environment that allows choices to be made. Even without the Bible, we assume the free-moral agency of man. Nevertheless, the manner by which God deals with man teaches us that God created man a true free-moral agent.

Joshua exhorted Israel, “*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ...*” (Ja 24:15). Isaiah also exhorted Israel to “*choose the good*” (Is 7:15). God pleaded with Israel to come and reason together (Is 1:18). He did not make them righteous. He did not force them back to His law. He allowed them the opportunity to choose their destiny. Such exhortations assume that Israel had the ability to make a choice that would affect their future and eternal destiny. The fact that God made these pleas to Israel is evidence that God allowed them to make a choice. And the fact that God allowed them to make a choice assumes that they had the freedom to do so.

In the New Testament free-moral agency is assumed even in the personal behavior of inspired men as Paul and Peter. These men were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and yet, they were allowed to make choices concerning their eternal destiny. The Spirit did not directly control their moral behavior.

**1. *Paul exercised free-moral agency:*** The work of the Spirit in the

life of Paul can be quite interesting. Did Paul always obey the counsel of the Holy Spirit? Did he always give heed to the forewarnings of the Spirit? In answer to these questions, it is necessary to understand an important point concerning God's use of visions to direct His chosen men. Throughout the Bible, visions are mentioned in situations where God directly appeared in some way to those He wanted to give counsel. We do not know exactly what transpired in a vision. It was an event that was so distinct and clear that the beholder perceived it as real. It was an almost real appearance that the one who beheld the vision received a moving picture from God concerning the future. However, understanding what a vision was is not the point. The point is that a vision was given in order to uphold the free-moral choice of the one to whom it was given. The beholder saw the vision, but he was allowed to make a choice as to whether to obey the vision. Visions were not subjective experiences. They did not take control of the individual. In other words, the fact that God gave the vision is evidence that He allowed the beholder to make a choice concerning obedience to the vision. Illustrations of this fact can be seen in the life of Paul.

**a. Paul's vision concerning evangelism in Asia:** In Acts 16:6 Paul and his mission team evidently determined to personally go into Asia to preach. However, "*they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.*" They thus changed plans and de-

cidated to go into Bithynia, a province of Asia. However, "*the Spirit did not permit them*" (At 16:7). The reason the Spirit did not want them to go to these areas is discovered in Acts 19:8-10. The Spirit foreknew that Paul would later have the opportunity to **indirectly** preach to all Asia through the medium of teaching in the school of Tyrannus. In Acts 16:9 Paul was given a vision that detoured his interests to Macedonia. However, he had a choice even concerning this vision. He could have disobeyed. The Spirit allowed him to exercise his free-moral agency by choosing to follow the instructions of the vision to go into Macedonia.

The fact that the Spirit "forbade" and "did not permit" in the above context indicates that something other than inner nudges and inclinations were used to detour Paul's plans. The fact that a vision was given to direct them to the correct location is also evidence that the Spirit guarded Paul's free-moral agency by giving him knowledge through vision by which he could make a choice. The Spirit simply did not force him to do anything.

**b. Paul's vision concerning obedience to his call:** Later in his life, Paul stood before King Agrippa and stated concerning the vision that led to his conversion as recorded in Acts 9, "*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision*" (At 26:19). In order for Paul not to be disobedient to the vision, he must have had the freedom to make a choice concerning the vision. Therefore, in reference to any vision, the beholder could make a choice. Free-moral agency was



not violated in the case of Paul in either Acts 9 or 16. In both occasions Paul had a choice whether to obey or disobey the visions.

**c. Paul's vision concerning travel to Jerusalem:** At the end of his missionary journeys, Paul was returning to Jerusalem. He came to Tyre. The disciples there "*told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem*" (At 21:4). Nevertheless, Paul continued on to Jerusalem. He then came to Caesarea. The prophet Agabus came down from Judea, and said, "*Thus says the Holy Spirit ...*" (At 21:11). Agabus then gave Paul a symbolic prophecy that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. Nevertheless, against the Spirit's warnings and counsel, Paul free-morally chose to go to Jerusalem. There he was arrested. In this case, Paul was allowed by the Holy Spirit to exercise his free-moral agency. He was given the knowledge concerning his future. He was left with a choice concerning that knowledge. He was not even moved emotionally within himself to change his mind, though the pleading of the brethren in Caesarea for him not to go to Jerusalem certainly influenced him (At 21:13,14). It is clear, therefore, that he was not controlled directly by the Spirit. In fact, when he went on to Jerusalem and was arrested, the Lord stood by him with the comforting words, "*Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome*" (At 23:11).

The conclusion to the direct work in the life of Paul would be that though Paul

as an inspired man was not directly controlled in his moral behavior by the Holy Spirit. When a vision was given to him, he still maintained the freedom to make a decision concerning what to do. In his decisions, he always followed the miraculous direction of the Spirit to accomplish specific works. At other times when it involved his personal safety, he chose to go on his own accord, though he was forewarned by the Spirit. In reference to his moral behavior, he was left to be a true free-moral agent.

Paul would conclude this point for us with the words, "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Co 9:27). Though Paul preached by inspiration, he was free-morally subject to that which he preached. In the same context of thought he exhorted Timothy, "*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*" (1 Tm 4:16). Though this thought seems to scare some, the fact is that these free-moral men were left on their own to do what Paul had told the Philippians, "*... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ...*" (Ph 2:12). When it comes to moral behavior that has reference to our salvation, every Christian is responsible for himself.

**2. Peter exercised free-moral agency.** Peter was also an apostle and a Spirit-inspired man. However, in Antioch of Syria he ran into some problems because of his lack of courage. In Antioch he freely associated with Gentile

Christians. However, when some Jewish brethren came up from Jerusalem, Peter “*withdrew and separated himself [from the Gentile brethren], fearing those who were of the circumcision*” (Gl 2:12). Paul confronted him about his fear of these legalistic Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. Paul later recorded, “*I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed*” (Gl 2:11). The *King James Version* translates the passage to say that Peter “*stood condemned.*” During the incident, “*even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy*” (Gl 2:13). The problem was that Peter and Barnabas were greatly intimidated by the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem. Their lack of boldness before these legalistic Jewish brethren led them to behave in a hypocritical manner in reference to the grace of God. We can understand Paul’s harsh judgment of Peter on this matter for Paul had faced similar false brethren in Jerusalem who sought to sinfully bind Jewish laws on Gentile Christians. Paul said that he and others “*did not yield submission even for an hour ...*” (Gl 2:5).

The above illustrates that in inspiration the Holy Spirit **did not directly control or change the moral behavior of Peter and Barnabas**. Peter was intimidated to be a hypocrite even though he had been given the witness of a special vision and experience of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles (See At 10,11). Peter had even experienced the working of many signs and wonders (At 14:3; 15:12). Nevertheless, he stood condemned on this occasion in Antioch when he allowed his personal lack of boldness

to be externally practiced in the church because of the intimidation of the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem. The point is, though he and Barnabas were inspired men, **the Holy Spirit in inspiration did not make them bold enough to withstand intimidation**. Both of them were struggling to overcome this lack of boldness even these many years after the establishment of the church. This attitude remained with Peter even after he had walked with Jesus for over three years. **If the Holy Spirit is to work directly upon the heart of man in order to change him, we would wonder why He failed in the case of changing Peter’s lack of boldness to publicly stand up to sinning brethren.**

The situation with Peter and Barnabas must also be viewed in the context of Paul’s request for prayers for boldness while in prison in Rome. He wrote, “*... praying always with all prayer and supplication ... that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak*” (Ep 6:18-20). Consider also the request for boldness by the church after the miraculous release of Peter from Herod’s prison. The church prayed, “*Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word*” (At 4:29). For these prayers to be made, it seems that in some way boldness can be granted. However, it cannot be granted in a way that would free the recipient from personal responsibility. It may have been that Peter and Barnabas

did not pray for boldness in Antioch when they feared the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem. It was certainly the case that Paul needed the special prayers for boldness of the Ephesian church when he was in prison in Rome. In both cases, we would not conclude that the answers to the prayers set aside the responsibility of free-moral agency.

The Spirit does not directly work on the moral behavior of man in any way to directly influence the attitudes and prejudices of men in violation of free-moral agency. At least, in the case of Peter and Barnabas the Spirit did not do this. Also consider as an example, the lives of Balaam and David. Though inspired by God, Balaam did not change his moral behavior or evil counsel (See Nm 22:38; 24:13; 2 Pt 2:15,16; Jd 11). Though David was inspired, the Spirit did not directly control his moral behavior by deterring him from committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sm 11:2-5). And though the Corinthian church possessed the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in abundance, Paul said they were behaving carnally (1 Co 3:1-3). They were selfish and covetous.

When speaking or writing by direction of the Holy Spirit in the word of inspiration, Peter and the other inspired men of God spoke truth. Their behavior, however, was subject to their personal decision. Though their revelation of the truth was under the **direct** guidance of the Spirit, their moral behavior was under the **indirect** guidance of that truth which they revealed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And by such, they exhorted

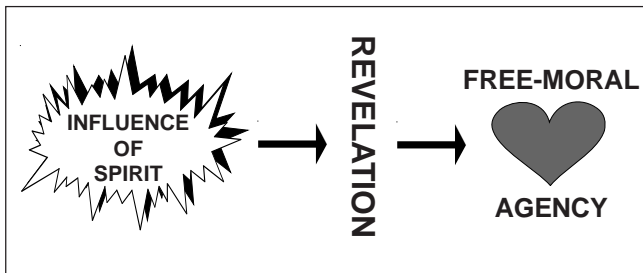
themselves and others to exercise free-moral choices in relation to their salvation. Peter exhorted Christians to give **“all diligence”** to grow in the graces of Christian living (2 Pt 1:5). In recognizing the choice of men, he exhorted Christians to **“be ever more diligent to make your calling and election sure”** (2 Pt 1:10). Concerning his guide for Christian living, he said, **“If you do these things you will never stumble”** (2 Pt 1:10). What is illustrated here is that Peter by inspiration reveals things **to be done**. He also expresses **individual responsibility** that these things be done. Emphasis is not placed on the Holy Spirit activating one’s heart to respond to the commands to be carried out. It is the responsibility of the individual Christian to **“be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless”** (2 Pt 3:14). It is the responsibility of Christians to **“keep yourselves in the love of God”** (Jd 21). Only in view of the fact that man is a true free-moral agent do these statements make sense.

**3. God expects man to exercise free-moral agency.** God holds man responsible for his behavior. The plea of the early evangelists, therefore, was, **“Repent!”** (At 2:38; 2 Pt 3:9). Such was a call for men to exercise their free-moral agency to bring their lives into harmony with God’s will. **“Cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit”** (2 Co 7:1). **“Do not touch what is unclean”** (2 Co 6:17). **Such pleas on the part of the inspired writers would be senseless if men could not make free-moral choices in relation to God’s law**

**without the aid of the Holy Spirit.** They would not make sense if the individual could not make any adequate response to please God. In the context of these exhortations, we wonder why there is the absence of pleas to submit to the Spirit's inner workings if He is to do such in the life of the alien sinner or saint. The point is that God will hold each individual responsible for his or her own behavior, regardless of one's beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul warned, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, **that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad**" (2 Co 5:10). The fact that we will be held accountable for ourselves in judgment means that the Holy Spirit will carry no burden for spiritual growth that would end in His accountability for our behavior. The Spirit will not be judged for our behavior. Each Christian will be held accountable for his own moral behavior.

In order to influence the moral behavior of man, the Holy Spirit works through the medium of revelation. In this way free-moral agency is guarded. We are without excuse if we refuse the Spirit's pleas through the word of God.

Our understanding concerning the work and influence of the Holy Spirit must teach the free-moral



agency of man. This is necessary because if the free-moral agency of man falls in any way, the justice of God in final judgment is attacked. Therefore, God has shielded the heart of man (his moral behavior) by making man a free-moral individual. Camp concluded, "Any work of the Spirit that does not conform to God's way of teaching His Word, or that would destroy or set aside man's free moral agency, is a misconception of how the Spirit works."<sup>5:35</sup>

Through man's free-moral knowledge of revealed truth, he is allowed to either respond negatively or positively to God's law. However, the influence of the Holy Spirit must not be viewed as directly influencing the moral behavior of man. If it is the work of the Spirit to directly control or influence the moral behavior of man, then man's free-moral agency is violated. If man's free-moral agency is violated, then the justice of God is under attack. Boles concluded,

God has never forced man to serve him. In the long history from the first of Genesis to the close of the New Testament, not one instance do we find where God has refused to let man do as he pleased .... God never compels man to serve him;

he has never coerced or forced man to do his will. He has always left man free and has

never used any coercion, nor has he used any coercive methods to force man to obey him.<sup>6:262</sup>

While we speak of the restraint and constraint of the Holy Spirit, yet we recognize that the Holy Spirit leaves man free to choose his own course in the work that he does. Man can turn a deaf ear to the words of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit will not force him to hear.<sup>6:263</sup>

Can God stand just in final judgment if the Holy Spirit is allowed to directly influence the moral behavior of man? Can any Christian be justly condemned to hell if it is the work of the Holy Spirit to influence the moral conduct of that Christian in order to keep him saved? Would the ability of the Holy Spirit to influence the apostate Christian enough

to guard him against apostasy be in question if that apostate were eternally lost?

If it is the work of the Spirit to directly activate man's response to the revealed word, then He must do so in a way that does not leave Him responsible if either an alien sinner or Christian is eternally lost. We wonder what effect the Spirit would have in such an operation if He could not activate the Christian's moral behavior to the extent of guarding him from apostasy. Whatever understanding one interprets from the Scriptures concerning the work, or influence of the Holy Spirit upon the moral behavior of man, his interpretation must not make the Spirit infringe upon the free-moral agency of man. If man's free-moral agency is set aside, then God's justice will be brought under question if only one Christian is eternally lost.

## Chapter 5

### The Work Of The Inspired Word

Before one can understand the work of the Holy Spirit, he or she must have a thorough understanding of the Spirit's work through the word He inspired to be written for man. It must be affirmed that the Spirit's **primary** work is through the effect the inspired word of God has on the world. His work to change the moral conduct of man has been through revelation and inspiration of God's will. We must not under emphasize this aspect of the Spirit's mission to man. The Bible is not just another book. It is God's work through the Holy Spirit to direct mankind

unto believing and obeying the will of God.

The religious groups that place a great emphasis on the direct and miraculous work of the Spirit in the lives of believers, almost consistently de-emphasize the importance of the written word of God. Some have gone as far as to exclude the study of the Bible because they believe that the Holy Spirit teaches us directly what we must believe and say. But God meant the Scriptures to be a vital connection between Himself and man. He intended that the Scriptures be His

spiritual link with man around which His sons would seek communication from Him. When we de-emphasize the importance of written revelation of God, our religion strays from God. It strays toward human authority. It strays toward unguided, and often, uncontrolled emotionalism or traditionalism. When either emotions or traditions are exalted above the word of God, then the religious individual is on his way away from God.

Those who stress a direct work of the Spirit in their lives are often subject to making discussions concerning the Spirit more of an emotional debate than a book-chapter-and-verse dialogue. When one stresses the emotional over the revealed word of God, the discussion concerning what is truth usually does not rest in the word. It rests in the strength of one's personal experience. When one's emotional experience is the foundation of his or her beliefs and behavior, then the word of God often takes second place. And it is difficult to have objective discussion with one who trusts more in his emotions than in the word of God.

Every Christian must encourage Bible discussion in areas about which there has always been differences of opinion. However, we must agree that the Bible is our final authority. When we discover in our discussion that there is much about the Holy Spirit which we do not understand, then we are ready for objective discussion. Unfortunately, some have not studied the matter enough

to realize that there is much about the existence and work of the Spirit that we do not understand. We must caution ourselves not to fill in with our emotions those things about which there is no revelation.

One thing we do understand in reference to the subject of the work of the Holy Spirit is **the Bible's emphasis on the work of the Spirit through the medium of the word of God.** One can completely trust in the word of revelation. One can be assured of his salvation by trusting in and obeying the Spirit-inspired word. This teaching is stressed throughout the Scriptures. It is an axiomatic truth, that is, it is something that does not have to be proved. This is simply the way God has worked throughout history to direct man's steps in the right direction. He has worked through word of revelation in order to communicate His will to man, whereby man can be assured of his salvation and direction in life according to the word of God.

#### **A. Work of the Spirit through revelation and inspiration:**

**Revelation is God unveiling truth to man that man by no other human means could have accurately known.** Paul stated "*that by revelation He [God] made known to me the mystery*" (Ep 3:3). In Ephesians 3:5 he explains how this work of revelation was carried out. "*Which [mystery] in other ages was not*

FATHER → SON → ANGEL → JOHN → WORD → CHURCH

made known to the sons of men, as it has now been **revealed by the Spirit** to His holy apostles and prophets.” Concerning the gospel he wrote, “*For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Gl 1:12). In the same way came John’s message to the seven churches of Asia. Revelation 1:1 reads, “*The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His servants ... and He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.*” This verse teaches the above channels through which the book of Revelation was made known.

Revelation 2:1 refers back to Revelation 1:1 in emphasizing the angel’s work in delivering the vision to John. However, Revelation 3:6 emphasizes that God worked through the inspiration of John in order to speak to the churches. By inspiration of the Spirit, John wrote, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Therefore, the Holy Spirit stood between John and the churches. The visions were revealed to John. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to record the visions by inspiration. Inspired words stood between John and the churches.

**Inspiration is man’s speaking and recording of divine revelation in an inerrant manner by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.** All revelation, therefore, is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, not all inspiration is revelation from God. For example, many of the historical statements of the Bible were personally known by the inspired writ-

ers. The inspired writers simply recorded history they knew by the direction of the Spirit in order not to make mistakes. By inspiration, therefore, revelation from God was preached and recorded. By inspiration the personal experiences and knowledge of the holy writers were also recorded.

It might be considered revelation that the known facts that the inspired writers knew, were revelation in the sense that it was revealed to them by the Spirit that these things were to be recorded. In other words, the Spirit revealed to the inspired writers that the facts that they already knew were to be a part of inspired Scriptures. This would not be the revelation of unknown facts to the writers. It would only be a revelation to the writers that the Spirit wanted certain known facts recorded. However, it would be best to classify this as inspiration. The Spirit inspired the writers to record specific known truths or facts that the writers already knew.

The word “inspiration” is used only once in the Greek New Testament. It is translated from *theopneustos* which literally means “God-breathed.” The actual manner by which God breathed the Scriptures is difficult to understand. We simply understand that “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*” (2 Tm 3:16). Peter helps some by saying, “*... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pt 1:21). The Greek word that is translated “moved” in 2 Peter 1:21 means to be “borne along.” Therefore, in some way

the Holy Spirit carried along the inspired writers in order to guarantee inerrant or infallible recording. In order to better understand the work of inspiration, consider the following scriptures:

**1. 1 Corinthians 2:10-13:** In reference to things that were revealed to him and the apostles, Paul wrote,

*But God has revealed them to us **through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.***

In this statement Paul gives us a more detailed explanation of inspiration. In his defense against the **uninspired** teachers of Corinth who were attacking his apostolic authority, Paul defines the nature of the inspired man. He said, “*And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom*” (1 Co 2:4). On the other hand, “*persuasive words of human wisdom*” were characteristic of the Corinthian false teachers, who “*by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Rm 16:18). But Paul’s words were “*in*

*demonstration of the Spirit and of power*” (1 Co 2:4). The Lord had confirmed his word “*through the accompanying signs*” (Mk 16:20). God bore “*witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles ...*” (Hb 2:4). Paul later reminded them, “*Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds*” (2 Co 12:12). The Corinthian’s faith, therefore, was not “*in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*” (1 Co 2:5).

Paul affirmed that the wisdom he had spoken to the Corinthians had come from God (1 Co 2:7). Uninspired men could not have known this wisdom because it came directly from God by revelation of the Holy Spirit (1 Co 2:7,8). Paul stated, “*God has revealed them to us **through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God*” (1 Co 2:10). This is what Jesus had promised the apostles when He said to them that the Spirit “*will teach you all things*” (Jn 14:26). The Spirit would “*not speak on His own authority, but **whatever He hears He will speak ...***” (Jn 16:13). “*No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God*” (1 Co 2:11). Paul said, “*Now we have received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God*” (1 Co 2:12). 1 Corinthians 2:13 states how the Spirit worked in fallible men in order to bring about that which is infallible. “***These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with***



*spiritual.*”

By revelation, therefore, the inspired writers received the “mind of God.” This was the work of the Holy Spirit. The “mind of God” was put into words in order to be communicated to man. It is now the responsibility of man to respond to the written mind of God. In this way, therefore, **the Spirit works through word of revelation.** God communicated His will to man through words. He now expects free-moral men to conduct their lives in agreement with this inspired word.

One cannot, therefore, separate the Holy Spirit from the written word of God that came as a result of the work of the Spirit. **We cannot separate the Spirit from the word. We also cannot separate the word from the Spirit.** This is why Jesus defines the Spirit in Scripture as “the Spirit of truth” (See Jn 14;17; 16:13). This does not say, as some have preposterously accused or affirmed, that the Spirit and the word are the same. Such misguided theological postulations must be ignored in order to understand the close relationship we must see in the work of the Holy Spirit through His inspired word. The Spirit and the word are not the same. However, the Spirit does not work on the heart of man without working through the medium of words of instruction that are in the Bible.

**2. 1 Thessalonians 1:5:** Paul wrote, “*For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*” This is an-

other definitive passage in relation to 1 Corinthians 2:4-13. This passage exemplifies the Spirit’s close relationship in work through the Scriptures. As in other places he went, Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica through the medium of words (1 Co 15:1,2). It came through the medium of words with **power.** The power was the confirming miracles that were promised by Jesus in Mark 16:20. The word also came to them “*in the Holy Spirit.*” The gospel did not come to them by means of Paul’s own personal words. It came by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul was “*borne along by the Spirit*” (2 Pt 1:21). The inspired word was preached to the Thessalonians, but the word was also confirmed by the miraculous work of the Spirit through miracles.

**3. 1 Corinthians 15:1:2:** Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*” Paul communicated the good news of the death of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope to the Corinthians. The medium of communication was preaching by use of words. In order for them to continue to stand on the truth of the gospel, **they had to continue to believe the words that he used to communicate the gospel to them.** The Corinthians had not experienced the gospel. They had not personally seen the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, the Holy Spirit worked through the medium of words of

communication in order to have the gospel proclaimed to the Corinthians. Through the written word of communication, the gospel is made known to us today. Therefore, God depends on the inspired word of God in order to communicate the message of the gospel to us today. We would know nothing about the gospel if it were not for the written word of God.

**4. Hebrews 6:4,5:** The Hebrew writer wrote,

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

This passage states that some apostates had heard and obeyed the word of God that had been confirmed by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. It can be assumed in this verse that these apostates had possessed the miraculous gifts of the Spirit when they were faithful. Some may have been as Demas who turned back from Paul (See 2 Tm 4:10). Demas, as Timothy, most assuredly was an inspired New Testament prophet. He would have witnessed the miraculous confirmation of the preached word by the Spirit. And yet, he turned back. The Hebrew writer affirmed that it was impossible to renew those who turned from the confirming work of the Spirit because

they had turned from the closest relationship the Spirit had to offer in Christianity.

After the initial establishment of the church on Pentecost, God worked through the preaching of the word of God. The preached word was then confirmed by the miraculous work of the Spirit. The Spirit's work, therefore, was not separate from the proclamation of the word of God. It was not that the Spirit was working miraculously in order to convert people. The word was first spoken (Hb 2:3). It was then followed by the miraculous confirming work of the Spirit (Hb 2:4). The early prophets went forth and preached through the medium of words (Mk 16:20). The Lord was "working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mk 16:20). Therefore, the word was first spoken, then the word was confirmed by the signs that followed.

**5. Luke 1:1-4:** When introducing his record of the life and ministry of Jesus to Theophilus, Luke wrote,

*Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and **ministers of the word delivered them to us**, it seemed good to me also, **having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account**, most excellent Theophilus, **that you may know the certainty** of those things in which you were instructed.*

At the time Luke wrote these words, there were many twisted stories and misrepresentations scattered throughout the world concerning Jesus. Theophilus had evidently heard some of these confusing stories. Therefore, Luke wrote in order that Theophilus might know the **certainty** of what actually happened in the life and ministry of Jesus. In this statement, Luke claimed inspiration. Since it was impossible for man to verbally hand down from generation to generation a correct account of the life and ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit guided the hand of Luke in order that a correct account be recorded for Theophilus. The Holy Spirit's work concerning our knowledge of Jesus comes only through inspired written words. It does not come to us directly through some supposed nudges the Spirit gives us. We would know nothing of Jesus if it were not for the inspired document of Luke, Matthew, Mark and John. The Holy Spirit did not directly give Theophilus knowledge of Jesus. Neither will He give us such today. We must study Luke's inspired record of the life and ministry of Jesus.

## **B. The work of the Spirit through the power of the word:**

The truth that was revealed to the apostles was first preached before it was written. It was first preached by the apostles by inspiration of the Spirit. It was then recorded by inspiration. Whether preached or written, it still affected the lives of men. The following scriptures emphasize the effect that God

meant for the Spirit-inspired word to have on the lives of men:

**1. Hebrews 4:12:** The "*word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" The word of God is able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. When one looks into it as a mirror, it has the power to tell him what he is (Js 1:23,24). God meant for the Spirit-inspired word to be a sword that corrects the life of the individual (See Ep 6:17). When preached, it will cut men to the heart (At 2:36,37).

**2. 1 Thessalonians 2:13:** Paul wrote, "*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe*" (1 Th 2:13). In this statement Paul affirmed that the word "*effectively works in you who believe.*" He sought to go to the Thessalonian church in order to perfect what was lacking in their faith (1 Th 3:10). He wanted to complete their teaching by the preaching of the word which brings faith (Rm 10:17).

**3. Acts 18:5:** Luke recorded, "*When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.*" Though there is a variant reading on this text, the United Bible

Society's Greek text retains the *American Standard Version* reading. Thus Paul "was **constrained by the word.**" As the word worked on the heart of Paul, he was moved in his spirit to preach the gospel in Corinth.

**4. Acts 20:32:** Luke recorded, "*So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, **which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.***" Paul told the Ephesian elders that the word had the power to **build them up.** He thus commended them to God and to His word.

**5. Jeremiah 23:29:** Jeremiah wrote, "*Is not My word like a fire?*" says the Lord, "**And like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces?**" God's word is "like a fire" that consumes. It is "*like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.*" God intends for His word to direct and change the lives of men. Strong metaphors were used in this passage in order to indicate power of the revealed word of God. God meant the word to be more than a casual influence in the lives of men. God intended that His word be as a fire and hammer in order to mold our lives into harmony with His will.

When God's word is accepted by humble and submitted hearts, it becomes an effective guide for the transformation of life. It can permeate the life of an individual only insofar as one allows it to be the rule of his or her life. In this way God protects our free-moral agency. We are allowed to respond in a voluntary way to the appeals of God through His word.

We will thus be held accountable in final judgment for our own sin.

### C. The work of the Spirit in communication through the word:

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to communicate the will of God to man. The means or medium by which the Spirit accomplishes this work is through word of revelation. The Spirit speaks today. However, He speaks as He always has spoken, through words of communication.

**1. 2 Samuel 23:1,2:** David said that "*the Spirit of the Lord **spoke** by me, and His word was on my tongue.*" The Spirit here spoke words by use of David's mouth. He did the same by all the inspired prophets (See Is 1:1,2; Ps 95:7-10). Jesus said of David, "*For David himself said **by the Holy Spirit ...***" (Mk 12:36). When the prophet spoke by inspiration, therefore, it was the Spirit speaking. Peter defined it thus, "*... the Holy Spirit spoke before **by the mouth of David ...***" (At 1:16). In the same way "*the Holy Spirit spoke rightly **through Isaiah ...***" (At 28:25). When an Old Testament prophet is quoted in the New Testament, it is often stated, "*as the Holy Spirit says ...*" (See Hb 3:7). Credit is given to the Spirit for the speaking.

**2. Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11:** In Romans 15:4 Paul wrote, "*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Rm 15:4). He stated

a similar thought to the Corinthians. “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Co 10:11). These two scriptures draw our attention to the things that were written by the Spirit in the Old Testament. Therefore, the Spirit speaks to us today through the recorded examples of Old Testament personalities. Though they are dead, they still speak to us through the inspired Old Testament Scriptures (See Hb 11:4).

**3. 1 Timothy 4:1:** Paul wrote, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons ...” (1 Tm 4:1). Paul said that “the Spirit expressly says ...” The Spirit’s communication to man is by what He says. It is thus by the words of inspired men. Jesus had promised the apostles that whatever the Spirit hears “He will speak ...” (Jn 16:13). “He will tell you things to come” (Jn 16:13). The Spirit told the inspired writers of the New Testament what to write. The Spirit speaks today through the medium of these inspired words. He “speaks” and “tells” through the medium of inspired words which we read in the Bible.

**4. 1 Corinthians 2:4-13:** In 1 Corinthians 2:13 Paul said, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Verse 13 expressly states that the Spirit communicated the mind of God by using words to speak spiritual things. Therefore, “holy men of God spoke as

they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1:21).

**5. Acts 11:14:** The angel said to Cornelius to send to Joppa to find Peter, for he “will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he began to speak to them what they must do in order to be saved (At 11:15). After he began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon the household of Cornelius. The angel had earlier told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter who would speak words by which he and his household would be saved (At 11:13,14). Though the Spirit miraculously fell upon Cornelius, the Spirit still communicated what he needed to do to be saved by means of words. He did not directly communicate to Cornelius that which he must do to be saved. God communicated that which he had to do to be saved through the preaching of Peter.

**6. Acts 8:26-40:** In this narrative of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, God first sent an angel to Philip to go toward the south along the road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza (At 8:26). God did not send an angel to the eunuch to preach the gospel to him. When Philip arrived at the place where he would encounter the eunuch in his chariot, the Spirit said to Philip to join the eunuch. Thus the Spirit did not communicate directly with the eunuch in order to tell him what he must do in order to be saved. The angel and the Spirit both worked through the medium of the preacher Philip who spoke words concerning Jesus to the eunuch. Therefore, God worked

to convert the eunuch as He works to convert men and women today. He works through the medium of the preached word (1 Co 15:1,2).

### **D. The work of the Spirit through the all-sufficiency of the word:**

The word of God is the result of the work of the Spirit. It follows, therefore, that the Spirit intends to work through the word which He inspired to be written. To what extent He plans to work is explained in His own words through the inspiration of the following statements. Paul stated that all Scripture was inspired in order “*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tm 3:16,17). Peter added that “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ...*” (2 Pt 1:3). The Scriptures are able to build us up (At 20:32) and work in those who believe (1 Th 2:13). It is apparent that the Spirit intended that His inspired word work thoroughly in the life of an obedient free-moral believer.

**1. *One is not held accountable for that which cannot be produced by free-moral obedience.*** If God intends for man to be of a certain spiritual nature that cannot be produced by free-moral obedience to the Scriptures, **then man cannot be held accountable for that spiritual growth beyond which obedience to the Scriptures can produce.** As a free-moral agent, man can be held accountable only for that which he can do in relation to a free-moral response to the Scriptures. If men are held accountable

for that beyond which they cannot accomplish through free-moral behavior, then the all-sufficiency of the word of God is attacked. God’s justice is attacked. We would thus be subjected to a religion of doubt concerning our salvation. We would never know if we were saved simply because we would never know if we were holy enough to deserve salvation.

**2. *One is not saved by perfect obedience to the word of God.*** To say that the Spirit works through the word of God to save, does not mean that one is to perfectly be obedient to the word in order to be saved. Such a legalistic concept of salvation would also produce doubt concerning our salvation because we cannot keep God’s law perfectly in order to save ourselves (Rm 3:9,10,23). By works of law, therefore, no one can be justified before God (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). It is for this reason that we must be saved by grace (Rm 5:1,2; Ep 2:8,9). It is through the word that the Spirit seeks to direct us according to the will of God. God never gave law as a means of salvation. Law directs. Law also frustrates in the sense that it cannot be kept perfectly in order to produce justification. Nevertheless, we have the law of Christ, the perfect law of liberty that frees us from the law of sin and death. We are liberated in Christ to obey because of our gratitude for the salvation that we have as a result of His grace (1 Co 15:10).

**3. *Since obedience to the word of God is necessary, then the word of God is sufficient.*** Camp wrote, “If the Holy Spirit operates directly and apart from the

word, then it must follow that the word is insufficient.<sup>25:31,32</sup> If the Scriptures cannot produce in man the spiritual growth that is required by God, then the Holy Spirit must assist in some way to produce growth. But if this is true, then it seems that the responsibility for the condemnation of the apostate Christian must rest on the shoulders of the Holy Spirit. This would be true since the Spirit would not have produced enough fruit of the Spirit in the heart of the condemned to prevent his condemnation. Also, the word of God must be accused of not being sufficient to lead a believer to be well-pleasing unto God.

**4. *Since the word of God is sufficient for godly living, then the Spirit cannot be held accountable for the loss of any soul.*** We could carry the preceding thought one step further. It is affirmed that the Spirit must “activate” the Scriptures in the life of the believer. If this is true, then the same blame must be placed on the Holy Spirit as in the preceding point when He does not fill in the gap between word-produced spirituality and that level of spirituality which God requires of him in order to be acceptable. If free-moral obedience to the values set forth in the Bible cannot be generated in the life of the believer apart from the “activation” of the Spirit, then the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures is again under attack. Woods wrote,

If there are influences wrought upon us, apart from and in addition to the revealed word of God, this word is not sufficient, and it requires these alleged additional

influences to provide all that God intends for us. Yet, the Book claims to supply our every need in every area of divine instruction. If it does, there are not other influences wrought upon us in this area; if it does not, its claims are false. But, if it may not be trusted in this matter, how may it be in any other?<sup>24:11</sup>

It is an important biblical truth that neither the Father, the Son nor the Holy Spirit will do for man what is required from man to save himself. Deity will not step in to guarantee one’s obedience. If we do not submit our lives to be conformed to the conditions of a covenant relationship with God, God will not do such. God demands obedience. He demands that men humble themselves in order to grow. If men will not submit to the instruction of His word, He will not do it for them. Tabor concluded,

We have the power to resist the call of the Lord or the power to accept it, depending upon our choice. The power of the word is not a compelling power, not a driving power, but a drawing power; hence we find admonition concerning the word in many places in the New Testament.<sup>25:468</sup>

That “level of spirituality” to which the Spirit is to take us beyond the ability of man’s free-moral agency cannot be a prerequisite for salvation. If there were such a “level”, then the Spirit should be held accountable for that which He is supposed to do in our lives beyond our submission to His written word. How-

ever, the fact is that man of his own will can never claim justification on the basis of obedience to the word of God. When Paul said that there is none who are righteous (Rm 3:9,10), he meant that there is none who is worthy of God's grace. We cannot earn ourselves into a saved relationship with God, for by works of law no man can be justified before God (Rm 3:20).

**5. All believers are responsible to work out their own salvation.** We must not misunderstand what Paul means in Philippians 2:12. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”* Paul did not say to **work for** your salvation. He said to **work it out**. We already have the salvation. Now it is time to work it out. Christians thus work because they are saved, not in order to be saved. We are created in Christ Jesus **for** good works, not **by** good works (Ep 2:10). Therefore, the work of the Spirit through the word of God must not be misunderstood to mean that the Spirit expects us to work ourselves into worthiness through obedience to the word.

We must always trust in the simplicity of the revealed Scriptures and their instructions we are to follow in order to please God. The Spirit seeks to direct our lives by instruction. Paul concluded, *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Co 11:3; see vss 13-15). The Spirit seeks to direct us

away from error and false beliefs by instruction through the word of truth.

The emphasis of the New Testament with regard to developing one's spirituality is on the word of God. We would not know what we must be spiritually if we were not told what to do or be through revelation from God. Jesus commanded the apostles to disciple, baptize and **teach** (Mt 28:18-20). Why would this command be given if Christians were to receive direct spiritual growth from inner workings of the Spirit? The first converts gave heed to the apostles' **teaching** (At 2:42). Why did they not give heed to the Spirit's supposed inner nudges? Paul commanded Timothy to **teach** faithful men who would be able to **teach** others also (2 Tm 2:2). Why did he not commend them to a supposed guidance of the Spirit? Peter commanded Christians to *“desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”* (1 Pt 2:2). *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord ...”* (2 Pt 3:18). Paul commended the Ephesian elders unto the word of God (At 20:32). He continues to commend us to the word of God today. His commendation was not to the Spirit, but to the word. We must, therefore, search the Scriptures that we *“may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tm 3:17).

Spirituality without a knowledge of the word of God leads only to superstitious spiritualism. No one can expect to be “spiritual” according to the will of God without a knowledge of the word of God. It is for this reason that Christians



must continually grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus in order to know Jesus (2 Pt 3:18).

## Chapter 6

### The Miracles Of God

We live in a religious world that has a confused understanding of the biblical teaching concerning miracles. Someone will ask, “Do you believe that miracles occur today?” No matter how this question is answered, there will be either misunderstanding on the part of the one who asks, or misrepresentation on the part of those who give an answer. If we say, “No, miracles do not occur today,” then the one who asked the question will think that we do not believe that God works today. He will think that we are deistic. In other words, he will think that we believe that God created the world, and then retired to some distant corner of the universe in order to have nothing to do with His creation. On the other hand, if we answer the question in the affirmative, then we have misrepresented the Scriptures. We have misrepresented the Scriptures because the Bible clearly teaches that miracles as defined in the Bible do not occur today. Therefore, regardless of how we answer the question – “Do you believe that miracles occur today?” – we will be misunderstood or we will misrepresent the Bible.

God does work today. He is actively working in the lives of His saints. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we think (Ep 3:20). If God is able to do above what we think, then cer-

tainly He is doing something. How we perceive what He is doing is the problem. Today, we perceive through faith, not sight. We perceive through faith that He is working in order that we not be tempted above what we are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). We perceive through faith that He answers the prayers of the righteous (Js 5:16). God is working, but His working is not perceived through our senses.

We live in a physical world that is controlled by the order of physical or natural laws. Our perceptions of the world and understanding of the order of our world are through empirical senses, that is, the five senses of man. We touch, taste, hear, see and smell things of our environment. This is the way God made us. We are thus subjected to a small physical environment in the presence of a supernatural world that is outside the perceptions of our empirical senses. There is another world beyond the world we perceive. However, we cannot perceive that world through the senses of man. We can build telescopes and microscopes in order to search distant corners of the universe or examine the minute particles of cells, but we will not break out of our physical environment and see God. The limitations of our senses are only magnified by our scien-

tific cleverness to search in detail our material world. The more we search, the more we understand how confined we are to our senses.

We cannot see God, for God is spirit and of the supernatural world that is beyond our perception (Jn 4:24). God cannot be directly seen by our sense of sight since He is not of the elements of this material world. We cannot perceive the work of God in the supernatural world simply because we are confined by our senses to a natural or material world. However, because I cannot perceive that which is beyond my senses is not justification to say that the supernatural world does not exist. It exists. I simply must search for evidence that points to its existence. I search for the testimony of those who have experienced God's breakthrough into our world. When I am convinced with the testimony of those who have experienced God's empirical manifestation into our physical world, then I believe. My belief, therefore, is based on the testimony of others. The Christian believes that the Bible is a trustworthy testimony of men and women who have experienced manifestations of God. The Bible is a valid record of the miraculous work of God in reference to the material world in which we live.

The preceding helps in some way to understand both the definition, as well as the purpose of what is referred to as miracle. Miracle is God's "breaking through" our barrier of limitations. It is God's making known to our senses that He both is and can work outside the control of natural laws. In other words,

miracle is God's signaling to man, in a way that man can perceive, that He is. A miracle is not God's extending or enhancing the empirical senses of man to perceive the presence and work of God in His supernatural environment. It is God's working in man's physical world in a way that man through his limited senses can witness the supernatural at work in a natural world. Miracle is God's working in our world in ways that are not according to the natural function of the laws of nature. Since we understand the laws of nature, we understand, therefore, that when God worked in a way that was different from the ordinary occurrence of natural laws, miracle occurred. Miracles must be so evident to our senses that we can understand that no law of nature was at work when the miracle occurred.

Now why would God seek to be sensed by man in the work of miracle? The answer is simple. God wants us to understand that our physical world that we perceive is not all there is. In fact, God wants us to realize that our world is only a temporary existence in the presence of an eternal supernatural existence that will go beyond this physical world. Once we discover this, then we will seek for that existence that is beyond this world, the existence in which God intends for us to dwell in eternity.

Through miracle God proves His presence and substantiates His purpose for our creation. Once He has proved His presence, then the means by which He proves His presence does not have to continue throughout history. Once the proof has been recorded by valid wit-

nesses who experienced the work of God through miracle, then we trust the authenticity of their record. We do not question their report because we have faith in the witnesses. We do not seek to add to their report, lest we assume that the report is either flawed or incomplete.

John wrote, *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...”* (Jn 20:30,31). John recorded in his document only seven miracles that Jesus worked during His ministry. These seven miracles were recorded in order that we believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. Therefore, John assumed that a record of only seven miracles was sufficient for one to believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. If we say that seven miracles are insufficient to produce faith, then we are saying that John’s purpose for recording the seven miracles of Jesus was insufficient. We thus attack John’s purpose for writing. We proclaim that his testimony is insufficient. Therefore, any claim of miracles today as those that were recorded by John is an attack against the sufficiency of not only John’s inspired document, but also an attack against the records of Matthew, Mark and Luke. How can one accept the written record of the gospel as recorded by John to be sufficient to produce faith, when at the same time cry for a miracle today in order to believe?

Thomas said that he would not believe unless he actually touched Jesus.

*“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (Jn 20:25). The same problem with faith prevails today among thousands who are crying for an empirical evidence before they will believe. They will not believe unless God invades their physical world with proof of His presence. As in the case of Thomas, their cry for another miracle is a manifestation of their lack of faith.

God does not need to add to the record of miracles that are found in the Bible simply because a sufficient testimony of His presence has already been revealed and recorded. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of God (Rm 10:17). Therefore, if one seeks to increase his faith, God says to search the Scriptures (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15). God’s answer for weak faith is not the manifestation of another miracle. His answer is that we search His record of miracles in the Bible.

This leads us to conclude that some want a cheap religion that is not based on a sincere desire to study and believe the word of God. Men want faith without the cost of study. God’s answer to such intellectual laziness is to “give diligence” to present oneself approved unto God (2 Tm 2:15). Herein is revealed the reason why God would not steal away our blessedness by coming to us directly through miracles (Jn 20:29). If God satisfied our lack of faith with an open manifestation of Himself through miracles, then we have to pay no price for faith. We would not have faith because we

would have the fact of His existence. We would believe that He is because of sight, not because of faith. We would walk by sight, therefore, and not by faith. The problem with walking by sight is that our personal characters are not challenged to depend on God. After all, the Israelites went astray even though they walked by sight through a divided Red Sea. Though Thomas witnessed the miracles of Jesus and His teachings, he still struggled with his faith. Therefore, it takes more than sight to build godly character. It takes more than sight to produce faith that is well-pleasing unto God (Hb 11:6).

The answer to whether there are miracles occurring today as those which occurred to give witness to the messengers and message of God in the first century, would be in the negative. God does not seek to work through miracles today simply because He wants us to search the testimony of those who have already witnessed His miraculous presence and work. However, this does not assume that God does not continue to work today. There is too much “evidence” in the ordinary life of the Christian to say that we believe in a distant God who is somewhere far off in the corner of the universe. The “evidence” of His work in our lives is perceived through faith. And thus, God limits our perceptions of His work in our lives today in order to stretch our faith. And faith must be stretched in order to grow. I would not sacrifice a stretched faith for a miracle. In this sense, therefore, we are more blessed than Thomas, the apostles, or anyone else in the Bible who actually experienced a miracle of

God. “*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***” (Jn 20:29). Those of us today who believe, and yet have not seen, are more blessed than Thomas and the other apostles.

### **A. Definition of biblical terms that refer to the supernatural:**

The English term “miracle” comes from the Latin word *miraculum*. This word was used to translate the Greek words *dunamis* and *semeion*. Both words were originally used in language to refer to that which causes wonder and astonishment. They were words that were used to refer to that which was extraordinary and unexplainable by human experiences.

The term “supernatural” has also come into use in reference to miracles. “Super” comes from the Greek word *hyper* that means “above.” When we say that something is “supernatural” we are referring to that which is above the natural. **A miracle is an extraordinary happening that is above, or beyond, the ordinary occurrence of natural laws that govern this physical universe.**

Though the words “miracle” and “supernatural” are used today to refer to all the work of God both past and present, the biblical interpreter must understand the common error that we make of reading our present-day experiences into the Bible. We define words by our experiences in everyday life. The word “miracle” is commonly used in our soci-

ety to refer to any unusual event that people experience. For example, what is easily understood as a physiological condition of epilepsy is often defined by some to be demon possession. A nervous condition on the part of some individuals may be referred to as demon possession by others. Some hallucination that one might experience at a time of emotional distress is often defined by some to be a vision from God. Unusual dreams are sometimes considered to be visions from God. All such experiences are also defined today with the words “miracle” or “miraculous.” The problem is that this definition is then read into the Bible where the word “miracle” is used. This is the problem many have with understanding the miraculous of the Bible. They define the miraculous work about which we read in the Bible with the experiences of their own lives.

If one assumes that God works today in the affairs of man as He has always worked in a miraculous manner in the past, then it is easy to assume that He miraculously works today. If we assume that He continues to work in our lives as He did in the life of Isaiah or Paul, then it is only natural to assume that miracles occur today in our lives. However, the problem with this method of interpreting the Bible is that we do not allow the Bible to speak for itself. We do not allow the Bible to be its own dictionary of the miraculous work of God. In other words, we do not allow the Holy Spirit through the inspired words of the Bible to define the miraculous work of God. We are using our own experiences as the

definition of God’s work. Our own experiences thus become the foundation upon which we interpret the word of God.

Since it is easy for men to be deceived by their own experiences and environment, it is imperative that Christians allow the Bible to define the miraculous work of God. It is imperative that the Bible be the only guide by which we understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of man. The following are biblical terms that are used in reference to the miraculous or supernatural work of God in the affairs of this world:

**1. *Teras*:** This Greek word is often translated “wonder.” It is a word that is never used by itself in reference to miracles (See At 2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 15:12; Hb 2:4). It is a term that emphasizes **the actual reaction of the people to the particular miraculous happening that they witnessed** (See Mt 9:26; Mk 2:12; 6:51; 7:37; Lk 8:56; 13:17). The use of this word defines a true miracle as an event that causes some type of reaction on the part of those who behold the miracle. Acts 4:14-16 records the reaction of unbelievers who witnessed the miracle of healing that Peter and John worked in healing the lame beggar at the temple. They said, “*For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it*” (At 4:16). Though Simon the sorcerer “astonished” the people with his magical tricks for years, he himself was “amazed” when he beheld the true miracles that were worked by Philip (At

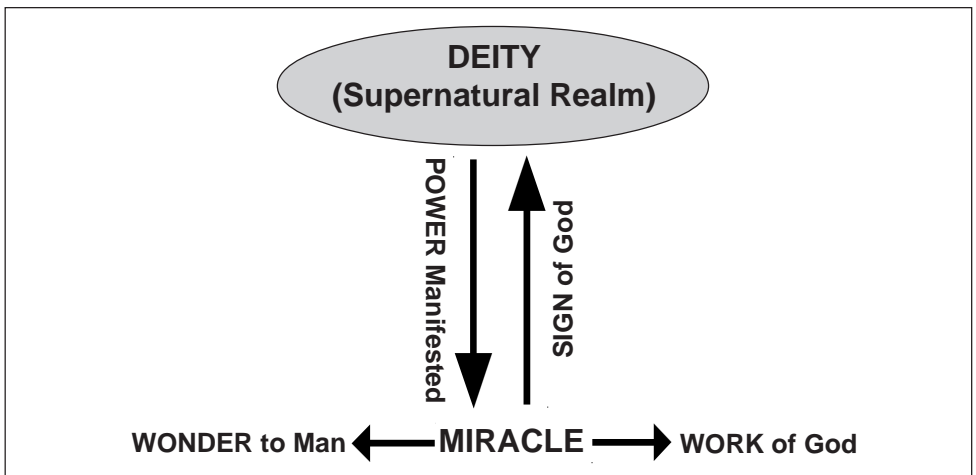
8:11,13). The action of a miracle is so strong, therefore, that it must stimulate a response in those who behold it. A valid and true miracle, therefore, cannot be denied even by those who are unbelievers.

The fact is that a miracle is not defined as such unless it does cause wonder on the part of those who behold it. Miracles were to confirm both the spoken word of God and the messengers who bore the word (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4). God’s work of confirmation was not meant to be carried out before believers. The work of confirmation of the word of God was to take place before **unbelievers**. Therefore, the miracle must be of such a nature that unbelievers have to admit that something above nature occurred in the event of the miracle. **The judge of whether or not a miracle occurs must be the unbeliever, for it was before the unbelievers that miracles occurred in order to confirm both the message and messenger of God.** This most vital truth is affirmed in the use of the word *teras* in reference to the miracu-

lous work of God as recorded in the Bible. Therefore, a miracle is a miracle only when it causes wonder on the part of the unbelievers.

**2. Semeion:** This Greek word is correctly translated “sign” (See Mk 16:20; Jn 3:2; At 14:3; 2 Co 12:12; Hb 2:4). In reference to supernatural works, the **purpose** of a miraculous event as a sign was to manifest to man the presence of the supernatural. In other words, **the sign was meant to be a token, or indication, of something above the actual happening itself.** The miracle as a sign directed the attention of the beholders to the Supernatural above that which is the natural. Miracles must signal the presence and work of God.

As in the use of the word “wonder”, the word “sign” must generate a response on the part of those who behold the sign. Nicodemus said, “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn 3:2). Nicodemus, and those who were with



him, witnessed the miraculous work of Jesus. Their conclusion was that Jesus was from God. They could have concluded this only if what Jesus did was beyond the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. The miraculous work of Jesus had to be so definitive that they could not deny that God was at work in His life.

The same was true in God's miraculous work with the disciples as they went forth to preach after the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. God was with them, "*confirming the word through the accompanying signs*" (Mk 16:20). The preached word was signaled to be from God. It was signaled to be the word of God by the miraculous work that God worked through the messengers. And, it was signaled as the word of God before **unbelievers**. A miracle, therefore, must be of such a nature that it has the powerful witness to signal before unbelievers that God is at work. We would not define a miracle as such if the unbeliever could deny its occurrence. In other words, there would be no "signaling" of the Supernatural if the unbelievers could deny or explain away the event of the miracle. True miracles cannot be explained away by unbelievers. They cannot be denied because the force of the event of the miracle is so strong that it works to confirm either the message or the messenger who worked the miracle.

**3. *Dunamis*:** This Greek word is usually translated in the English Bible with the words "powers," "mighty deeds," or "mighty works" (See At 2:22; 19:11). **Emphasis on a miraculous event as a "power" is placed on the**

**supernatural power that is revealed through the occurrence of the event.**

A miracle as a power is meant to manifest the tremendous energy of the realm of God in relation to the physical environment of man (See Gn 18:14; Is 40:12-17; At 15:12; Mt 10:1; 12:28). As a power, a miracle manifests the nature of the environment in which Deity dwells. A miraculous power is a manifestation of the real environment of the supernatural that has existed from eternity and will exist, from our viewpoint, into eternity without end when this world ceases to exist.

As with the words "wonder" and "sign," a miraculous work as a power must be defined as such by those who behold the event. If the event does not manifest power that is beyond the natural world in which we live, then it is not a "power." It is only something that has happened according to the ordinary occurrence of natural laws of this world. Therefore, in order for a miraculous event to be defined as a power, it must be witnessed by those who confirm its occurrence as greater than the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. In the biblical context of definition, miracles were defined as powers by the unbelieving beholders of the miraculous events. Pharaoh did not at first know the God of Israel (Ex 5:2). However, after the power of God was unleashed through the ten plagues, he realized that a Supernatural power was working (Ex 12:31). The same was true of many unbelievers throughout the Bible's record of God manifesting power through miraculous works (See Dn 3).

Therefore, any event that is proclaimed to be miraculous, and yet, does not convince the unbeliever that it is the Supernatural at work, cannot be defined as a biblical miracle. If the event has the power to convince the unbeliever, then it is the power of God at work.

**4. Ergon:** This Greek word is translated “works” or “deeds” throughout the New Testament (See Jn 5:36; 6:28,29; 7:21; 10:25,32,37,38; 14:11,12; 15:24). In reference to miraculous activity, **a miracle as a work signified the natural activity of the environment of God that is manifested to men.** As a work, a miracle indicates the natural environment in which God dwells. If Jesus is the Son of God, as He so claimed, then we would expect Him to work as God. We would expect Him to reveal the supernatural world that is beyond this world. We would expect Him to manifest the environment of God that is beyond the perception of our senses. And this He did.

The very nature of the miraculous to manifest the environment of God defines a miracle to be something that is not of this world. If the event can be explained by the occurrence of any natural law or the psychological activity of any person, then the work is not a miracle. If one can explain the psychological power of the mind to block out a bodily pain, then it is not a direct work of God. If one can explain the hypnotic ability of one who has hypnotized another, then it is not a miraculous work. A miracle as a work of God cannot be explained by any scientist or psychologist. Miracles are unexplainable by our knowledge of the

physical world in which we live. A miracle as a work of God must be witnessed to be the activity of the Supernatural as opposed to the work of man.

From the Holy Spirit’s use of the words *teras* (wonder), *semeion* (sign), *dunamis* (power) and *ergon* (work) in reference to the activity of God among men, He wanted to convey the meaning that action or reaction must take place on the part of man. These Greek words in reference to miracle, therefore, are defined by the response of those who witnessed the occurrence of the miraculous event. In the case of miraculous work that is recorded in the Bible, it would be the work of God before either those who did not believe, or were struggling to believe. It was not the purpose of the miraculous to convince the true believers. They did not need convincing. God worked to generate wonder on the part of unbelievers in order to convince them that He was present with His message and messenger. He worked to signal to beholders that His message must be heard and obeyed. He worked powerfully in order to dispel any question as to who was at work. And thus, His intervention in the affairs of man was defined as the work of God. He worked through the miraculous in order to accomplish the purpose of convincing unbelievers that His messengers were sent from Him. Jesus said, *“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me”* (Jn 5:36).



Our definition of the words that are used to refer to the miraculous work of God still leaves us wondering what actually took place when a miracle occurred. Our words, whether Greek or English, do not adequately define the work of God in His intervention into our natural world. It will be easier to understand the work of miracle by understanding the realm of the Supernatural, though it is difficult to understand the environment of God by use of earthly words. The preceding Greek and English words are words that express the experiences of man with man. It is difficult for man to use his dictionary to explain that which is above his experience. Paul said that he was caught up to Paradise and “*heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*” (2 Co 12:4). In other words, he saw things that could be expressed only by using “God’s heavenly dictionary” which has no earthly definitions. If he did utter such words, we could not understand them because they would have heavenly definitions. Such illustrates the difficulty we have in using earthly-defined words to explain heavenly activities among men in the form of miracle.

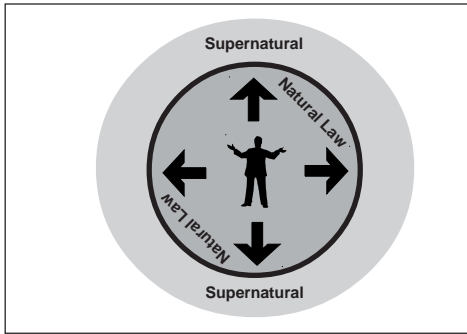
## **B. The intervention of the supernatural into the natural:**

Miracles in the Bible have often been misunderstood because men have failed to understand the nature of what happened during the occurrence of a miraculous event. In fact, this is the central reason why men and women today misunderstand the word of God. They misun-

derstand that there is a difference between the work of God in breaking through the natural world of physical laws in a miraculous manner and the work of God behind the physical laws of our senses. We have often tried to define a miracle in human terms, and this has led to a host of confusing confrontations. We have more often failed than succeeded in coming to a common and consistent understanding of the work of God in the affairs of this world.

Admittedly, understanding what actually happens in God’s miraculous work is difficult for us who reside in a physical world. This is why it is absolutely imperative to allow the Bible to first speak for itself. If we allow our experiences to determine the definitions of miracle, then we are in trouble. We are in trouble because everyone has different experiences. The point is that our experiences must be directed by the Bible and defined by God through the Bible. Regardless of our inability to completely comprehend how God works, the following discussion will give at least an attempt to understand what was manifested or took place during the occurrence of a miraculous event:

**1. *The environment of God:*** God is of an environment that is not governed by “laws” with which we are acquainted. We use the word “laws” simply because there is no other word we can use to explain the order of God’s environment. God is spirit (Jn 4:24). Spirit is not subject to natural laws that govern the material world. Deity is in a realm of “super”

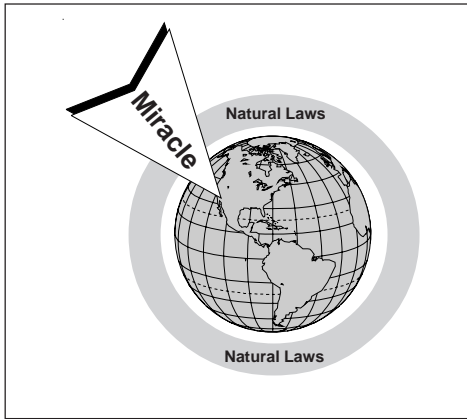


natural law, or law that is above this physical world. In other words, God as spirit is not subject to gravity, heat, wind and those processes that control and maintain order in the physical environment of this world. Paul was caught up into a realm which he called “the third heaven.” He was caught up in some manner that we do not understand (See 2 Co 12:4). Neither do we understand the nature of the third heaven. He was simply caught up to a realm of existence that could not be explained by the words of human communication.

**2. The environment of man:** Man lives in an environment that is governed by **physical laws**. God created a physical world. In order to maintain order in this world, physical laws were also created. As physical beings, we are subject to physical laws. We are subject to gravity, heat, wind and all natural laws that control our environment. Without these laws, there would be chaos in our world. In fact, this world could not exist without natural laws that control all life and maintain order in the material world. As physical beings, we could not exist in a world that was not controlled by physical laws.

It must be understood also that the physical world would not exist apart from God. This does not mean that God is partly physical or material. It simply means that God **maintains** the existence of the physical world by the presence of supernatural law. Our world is held together by His power. In other words, the physical world remains in existence because God keeps it in existence. This was expressed in the words of Hebrews 1:3 concerning Jesus, “... *who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power when ... He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*” When Jesus was given all authority and power (Mt 28:18), He was given control to maintain the existence of the physical world. It is held together by the power of His command. Therefore, all that exists is sustained and continued because of the power of God.

**3. The manifestation of the supernatural environment of God:** In order to understand what happens in the occurrence of miracle, one must understand the relationship between the realm of Deity and the realm of man. Physical laws are always subject to supernatural laws. **When miracle occurred, it was an occasion when the supernatural took direct control of the physical. And when the supernatural directly takes over the physical, the physical cannot carry on with its normal activity.** Blindness is the result of some physical law that was violated or was changed by an outside influence at the birth of an innocent babe. Though the violation of physical



law may have caused the blindness, the blindness cannot be reversed by the ordinary processes of physical law. In miracle, the physical law is superseded. Physical law is set aside. Natural laws of this world are set aside for a moment in order that the supernatural laws accomplish that which is not possible for natural laws to do. Thus, miracle occurs. The blind see. The cripple walk. The dead are raised.

In the occurrence of miracle, therefore, the realm in which Deity dwells is manifested to the senses of man. We perceive that God is at work because something out of the ordinary happens. In this way, miracles help us to some extent to understand what heaven will be. At the end of time, this physical world will be destroyed and we will dwell in an environment which is beyond, above or outside the control of natural law. We will have spiritual, immortal bodies that will supersede the natural laws of this world. We will have a new habitation that will not be subject to the natural laws of this world (2 Co 5:1-8). In some way,

therefore, we will dwell with a heavenly body that will not suffer the calamity that our bodies often suffer in this world of natural law.

Peter expressed the finality of this physical world in 2 Peter 3:10-14. He stated that “... *the heavens will pass away ... and the elements will melt with fervent heat, ... both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ... all these things will be dissolved ... the heavens will be dissolved ... the elements will melt with fervent heat ... look for a new heavens and a new earth ...*”

Peter was affirming that the physical earth and physical planets and stars (the heavens) will in some way be terminated. After this termination, comes the realm of the “new heavens and earth.” The new heavens and earth will not be as this physical world and universe. It will be a dwelling place in which there will be no suffering from the causes of natural law. The present environment of man will be changed. Therefore, the laws that govern our present environment will also be changed. After the finality of this present environment, we will in some way live in the environment of supernatural laws. It is for this reason that when this physical body in which we now dwell is resurrected at Jesus’ coming, it “*shall be changed*” (1 Co 15:52).

It is necessary to change this physical body to an “incorruptible” body in order for it to dwell in a new environment that will be subject to new laws. These laws will not be environmental laws as we know them in this present physical world. Paul wrote, “... *flesh and*

*blood [the physical] cannot inherit the kingdom of God [the spiritual realm of heaven]; nor does corruption inherit incorruption*" (1 Co 15:50). Therefore, *"this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Co 15:53). Death will be *"swallowed up in victory"* because mankind will no longer be subject to physical laws that bring about physical death (1 Co 15:54). This is actually a beautiful thought and one that should bring much comfort to Christians (1 Th 4:13-18).

We must look at miracles, therefore, not simply as occurrences that proved Jesus to be the Son of God, nor the confirmation of the word of God. **The serendipity of the miracle was to give us an indication of where we are going as Christians.** One day we will step into another environment. It will be close to that in which God now dwells. We personally do not think that it will be the same as that in which God dwells. We would have to be gods ourselves in order to dwell in an environment of God. However, we do trust that Jesus is preparing a new place, a new environment wherein the pains of this present world will have all passed away (See Rv 21:4). Though we will never understand this new environment while in the flesh, we can only speculate that it will be far above or beyond the physical world in which we now dwell.

**4. The manifestation of authority to unleash the supernatural of God:** We often say that a miracle was "performed" by a certain individual. This terminol-

ogy is fine if we understand what we are saying. The New Testament evangelists "worked" miracles. The word "performed" is often understood to mean that someone does a performance of an act. But this is not what happened in reference to those who commanded the supernatural to touch the lives of others as recorded in the Bible. Though it is difficult to actually understand what happened in the event of a miracle, we must understand that Elijah and Peter did not make a performance in order to satisfy the idle curiosity of man.

The fact is that the worker of the miracle actually **did not perform a miracle by some invested ability that was inherent within the individual himself.** What actually happened in miracle was that an individual **was given authority to unleash the environment of the supernatural into the environment of the physical.** Moses' dividing of the Red Sea was an indication that God had given him the authority to call upon Him (God) to touch the natural world. Moses did not actually have inherent divine power as a God. **The power came from God.** Moses was only given the authority to call upon God to divide the Red Sea. When Peter raised Dorcas, Peter had been given the authority to call on divine power in order to touch the physical body of Dorcas so that she be restored to the living. In other words, the earthly agent who worked the miracle did not actually "have power" to work miracles.

The earthly agent was given authority to call on God to transcend the super-

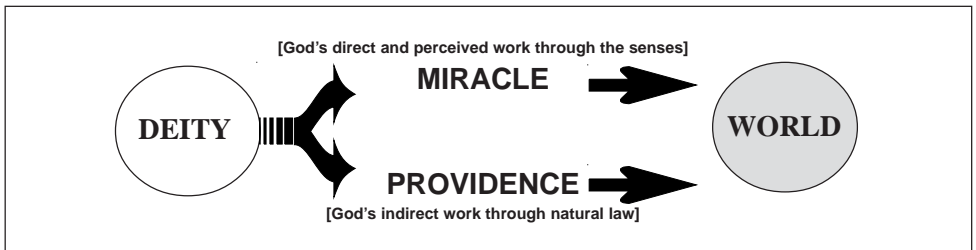
natural into the natural. And when this occurred, miracle occurred. When a miracle occurred, the messenger of God and his word were confirmed (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4). This is why Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn 3:2). In the case of Jesus, the miraculous proved that His word was from something other than this world. Such also proved that He Himself originated from somewhere other than this world (Jn 20:30,31).

Jesus’ authority over the natural world went beyond His miraculous works during His ministry. It extended to His bodily resurrection that was of His own accord. He said, “*I have power to lay it [My life] down, and I have power to take it again*” (Jn 10:18). Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead was the final proof that He was the Son of God. By His resurrection He affirmed His deity and power as God over the natural laws of this world. Paul wrote, “*Jesus Christ ... was ... declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead*” (Rm 1:3,4). Jesus allowed His physical body to be killed. But He raised Himself a changed body which even John and the other apostles who touched it did not fully understand (Jn 20:24-29; 1 Jn

3:2).

The purpose for which Jesus and the disciples unleashed the supernatural explains why God will not allow Satan to work any miracles. God has never given Satan authority to manifest the supernatural world. **If Satan has the authority to unleash the supernatural upon the physical in the same manner as Jesus, the prophets and apostles, then the “proving power” of the miracle in the lives of the messengers of God has lost its purpose.** The purpose of miracle was to confirm the word and to confirm the origin of Jesus (Mk 16:20; Jn 3:2; Hb 2:3,4). If Satan has the authority to also work miracles, then we would be confused. We would not know whether to believe Satan with his so-called miraculous deeds or to believe Jesus and Paul with their message and miraculous deeds. Therefore, in determining the definition of the miraculous, we must make a distinction between the deceptive work of Satan and the work of God through miracles. (See Book 7.)

**5. Direct action means miraculous:** When the environment of the supernatural directly touches the natural, **miracle must occur. Change has to take place.** In a study of the Holy Spirit, it is very important to understand this point. In the occurrence of miracle, the divine law di-



**rectly** takes control of the physical. The divine supernatural laws are so overpowering that they cannot “come into contact with” that which is flesh and blood and nothing happen. When God dealt **directly** with the waters of the Red Sea, miracle occurred. When God dealt **directly** with a lame man at the pool of Bethesda, miracle occurred. **When God works directly in the physical environment in which we live, miracle occurs.** Therefore, it is necessary to understand that when God works in a direct manner in the life of an individual, miracle of necessity must occur.

For this reason, God maintains the physical world **indirectly** through natural laws. Natural laws are **directly** upheld by the “*word of His power.*” The natural world is **directly** upheld by the control of natural laws. However, **supernatural law indirectly upholds the material world through natural law.** Natural law is the **medium** by which God controls the physical world. Without this medium, we would be living in a supernatural world.

One’s concept of the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit must take into account the result of the **direct** action of God into the physical world in which we live. If we affirm that the age of miracles has passed, then we must affirm that the age in which God worked directly in the physical world in order to be perceived by man has also passed. **To say that God does not work directly today is the same as saying that He does not work in a miraculous manner to be perceived by man through the five senses.**

This does not say that God has ceased to work in the affairs of man or the physical world. God simply works in a manner that is not sensed by man through the five senses. However, God has ceased to work in a manner that is perceived by man through his senses.

The Bible defines “miracle” as follows:

1. God working to accomplish specific purposes,
2. God working in a way to cause instantaneous results,
3. God working in a way to cause results that are not the ordinary occurrence of natural law, and
4. God working in a way to be perceived without doubt through the senses of men.

When the above things happen in reference to the work of God, we say that a miracle has occurred. But the Bible also teaches that God “works” today in the affairs of man. His work, however, is not defined as “miracle” according to the biblical definition of a miracle.

We use the word “providence” to identify His work today. This word is used to explain God’s continued work in a way that can be perceived only through faith. Though God’s work in providence is not according to the ordinary occurrence of natural laws, we do not immediately perceive His work in action. Through faith we understand and believe that He works. Through faith we understand that the deliverance of someone from sickness or tragedy is a work of

God. However, we cannot use this “work of God” to prove our faith as miracles were used in the lives of the New Testament saints to confirm the message and messengers of God. Because the Bible defines the purpose and event of a miracle, we cannot use this definition to explain the work of God today if the preceding four points are not accomplished. Nevertheless, God is at work beyond our perceptions.

The above brings us to a definition of what is meant by **non-miraculous**. Technically speaking, the non-miraculous work of God is miraculous according to our earthly understanding of God’s work, for all of God’s work is “miraculous” in comparison to the ordinary occurrence of natural law. The only reason we refer to God’s activity as non-miraculous is because **such work is not instantaneous in occurrence and perceived through the five senses**. Therefore, when we refer to God’s present work as non-miraculous, we are not saying that He has detached Himself from the material world. He still works. However, His working is not directly perceived through our senses. **Because His work is understood by faith, not sight, we say He works in a non-miraculous manner or providential manner.** (More on this later.)

**6. God’s work through medium:** In order for God to work without miraculous manifestation, He must **indirectly work through medium**. Since He has accomplished His purpose for working directly in order to signal the divine origin of His word and His confirmation of

His messengers, He works in a way that is not directly perceived by man. But how does He do such without our knowledge that His working has actually taken place? We know that He has worked in our lives when we walk by faith (2 Co 5:7). We call this work of God “providence.” Though this is not a biblical word, it is the best word we can use since it refers to God **providing** in request to prayers (Js 5:16). It refers to God **providing** a way of escape from temptation (1 Co 10:13). God **provides** for us in that He works exceedingly abundantly above all that we think or dream (Ep 3:20). Though we must walk by faith in understanding the providential work of God in our lives, we know that He is there and that He has worked remarkable things that we cannot explain.

God’s work through means and mediums also applies to our understanding of how the Holy Spirit indwells and works in the life of the Christian. When we discuss the indwelling of the Spirit, it is affirmed that the Spirit personally indwells the saints. By this it is commonly meant that the Spirit actually resides within the human body of saints. There are those who also believe that the Spirit indwells the individual **through the medium** of the revealed word of God. Regardless of one’s personal understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, **the real issue is how does the Holy Spirit actually work on the moral behavior and in the life of the Christian**. If it is **direct**, then it must be miraculous, for direct means that God is

actually taking control; something is directly happening. In other words, we would say that the Spirit could not directly touch the moral behavior of man **without actually making complete changes in that behavior to conform in every way to the perfection of the fruit of the Spirit** (Gl 5:22,23). Whatever one's understanding of this matter may be, he must deal with the matter of whether God can **directly** touch something without that something completely conforming to His will. Can the Holy Spirit work **directly** without causing complete change in moral behavior? **Can God work directly without working miraculously?** Can the environment of God touch the physical environment of this world without the manifestation of

miracle?

The preceding are questions every biblical interpreter must deal with in studies concerning the work of God in the affairs of man. The Father, through the Spirit, continues to work in the affairs of men. Understanding that He works is clear. Understanding how He works today may be beyond our complete understanding. However, this must not frustrate us. We must be perfectly content to maintain our humanly inadequate understanding of those things that pertain to the work of God in our lives. At least while we are confined to this earthly environment of physical law, we will be unable to comprehend that which is of another world, the world of an eternal God.

## Chapter 7

### The Providence Of God

God does work in the affairs of the natural world and man. However, He works today in a manner that is perceived through the faith of the believer. We refer to this as the providential work of God. Though this word is not used in the Scriptures to refer to God's work, it is a word that defines God's working "behind the scenes" to bring about His foreplanned purposes. The closest Greek word that is used which can be translated providence is *pronoia* (See At 24:2 and Rm 13:14 where the word is used in a secular sense).

The word *pronoia* means "forethought" or "foresight." This is what God

has done or is doing in reference to the material world and the affairs of man, especially in the affairs of His people. God has foreplanned His eternal work and is bringing about His plans. Though God worked in a miraculous manner in the past to accomplish His purposes, we conclude that He works today after what we would call a **non-miraculous** manner in order to also accomplish His plans as time transpires in the history of the world. We use the word "providence" to refer to this non-miraculous manner of God's work.

All men have their existence in God. Paul said that "... *in Him we live and move and have our being ...*" (At 17:28). "*For*



*in Him and through Him and to Him are all things ...*” (Rm 11:36). God, therefore, is one who sustains all things (Hb 1:3). He is not a distant God. He is always present in a providential way in His creation. In God’s work through providence, we affirm that He works “*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*” (Ep 3:20). This is Paul’s statement that all of God’s work is not comprehended or perceived by man. We know that God works. Understanding how He works was not totally understood by Paul. It is the same with us today. We know that God works, but we do not know how He works. We see the results of His work, but we do not know how He brought about that which we see. In this manner, therefore, we walk by faith in believing that what we see and experience was not by coincidence.

The following points depict what we would refer to as God’s non-miraculous providential work in the affairs of nations and in the life of Christians. These are biblical statements of fact. How God goes about His work is His business. We would not presume to detail how He actually carries out His work in accomplishing His desires in the affairs of this world. Simply because we cannot perceive His non-miraculous work as we would perceive his miraculous work, does not deny that He is working. We must never allow our small world of sensed perceptions to limit the work of God who works in another realm than the physical world.

### **A. God opens doors.**

While in prison Paul asked that the Colossians pray for him “*that God would open to us a door for the word ... that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak*” (Cl 4:3,4). We do not know how God would non-miraculously open this door. However, Paul asked the Colossians to pray that God might open it for his preaching the gospel. Since Paul asked the Colossians to pray that the door be opened, then we must assume that there was the possibility that the door open. We must also understand that even if they prayed for it to be opened, God could have not opened it.

Believing in the providence of God is to walk by faith. It is accepting the fact that we must trust in God who we believe is working for the benefit of Christians. We depend, as Paul, on God’s providential work through faith. We pray for open doors, but it is still God who has the final decision. If He chooses not to open the doors, then we must conclude that He is not working to open a particular door. He may have a greater or different door to open than the one for which we prayed.

If God opens the door, then we understand that something other than natural laws were at work. God could have used natural laws to open the door about which Paul wrote. However, the fact that Paul did not believe the door would open without the work of God, is a statement of truth that God can and does intervene in the affairs of this world in a manner that is not perceived by man. He is working non-miraculously, but not directly

wherein we would define His work as miraculous according to the biblical definition of miracle.

## B. God directs.

Paul wrote to the young church in Thessalonica, “*Now **may** our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, **direct our way to you***” (1 Th 3:11). Notice first that Paul used in this statement the word “may” in reference to the work of God. This word does not express certainty. Paul desired that God direct him to once again be with the Thessalonians. He prayed that the Father and Son make this reunion possible. His use of the word “may” means that he left the answer to his prayer in the hands of God.

Paul also wanted to go to Rome previous to the writing of the book of Romans, but he was **hindered** from doing so (Rm 15:22). He had been previously **hindered by Satan** from going to the Thessalonians (1 Th 2:18). He believed that God worked in his life in order to direct his way to those places where he needed to go. However, such direction was not miraculous. He trusted in Philemon’s prayers that he would be released from prison and granted to Philemon (Pl 22). Nevertheless, **he walked by faith** in this working of God in his life.

At least on one occasion the Spirit did work in a miraculous manner in order to direct Paul. The Lord came to him by vision (At 16:6-10). But we must accept this miraculous direction as unique. It was accomplished for a special purpose

at a time in Paul’s evangelistic ministry when he did not know exactly where he should go. God wanted Paul to go to Macedonia, though he had planned to go to Asia or Bithynia. Paul could not see the future, and thus did not know that God had other plans for reaching Asia. While Paul was two years in Ephesus on the third missionary journey, all Asia heard the word through others Paul taught and influenced in Ephesus (At 19:8-10).

How God works in some matters is beyond our understanding. In reference to Onesimus’ running away from Philemon and subsequent conversion by Paul in Rome, Paul wrote to Philemon, “***For perhaps** he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever*” (Pl 15). If a Christ-sent apostle would express his uncertainty concerning the work of God by saying “for perhaps,” **then certainly it would not be a lack of faith on our part to express the same today concerning what might or might not be the work of God.** We might express our certainty in the work of God in our lives, but our certainty is based on faith.

As Paul, we must trust that God is working all things “*together for good to those who love*” Him (Rm 8:28). We thus walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7). Providence is our perception **by faith** of God’s work in our lives. Miracle would be our perception **by sight** of God’s work. Miracle was meant to be an evidence of God’s presence. Providence is not meant to be such. The primary purpose of providence is God’s working in order to bring about His purposes in the affairs of man

and the events of history. We walk by faith, trusting that all things are working together for good. We are more blessed than those as the apostles who actually saw the miraculous work of God because our faith is stretched and molded. The growth of our faith develops our characters. And thus, our characters are being prepared for heavenly dwelling by the providential work of God.

### C. God protects.

God offers Christians protection by deliverance. When tempted, God *“with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Co 10:13). Paul did not say in this statement that the temptation is taken away. Somehow God can work in the circumstances of the situation in order to make a way of escape. Jesus stated, *“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Mt 6:13). In delivering us from temptation God works through some medium or in some way to deliver us, though He does not work a miracle that is manifested to our senses. He also works in a way in which He cannot be accused of showing respect of persons. He does not work in a way to bring under question His justice in the final judgment. In honoring man’s free-moral agency, therefore, He works in some way to provide the way of escape. He delivers us from the evil one. But He does all this behind the curtain of our perceptions in order to work on our behalf.

Paul said of one event of his life, *“I was delivered out of the mouth of the*

*lion”* (2 Tm 4:17). He trusted that the Lord would deliver him *“from every evil work”* (2 Tm 4:18). Peter affirmed, *“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation ...”* (2 Pt 2:9). Nevertheless, Paul was beheaded in Rome after he wrote 2 Timothy 4:18. Peter suffered a similar death at the hands of those who led him away for execution (Jn 21:18). These great men trusted in God’s deliverance. And God did deliver them until they had *“finished the race”* (2 Tm 4:7). God will deliver according to His own plans for our lives.

There are godly men who have met with untimely deaths. We wonder concerning the early death of the apostle James at the hands of Herod (At 12:1,2). Why did God allow a Christ-sent apostle to suffer martyrdom so soon after the establishment of the church? Our understanding of God’s deliverance must be reconciled with the untimely and accidental death of godly saints. In order to deal with this area of uncertainty, we must rely on Paul’s “subjunctive attitude.” It **may** be that we will continue. **Perhaps** it is God’s will. We do not know God’s reason for the possible untimely death of an evangelist who is doing a great work. We simply trust that God is at work. We walk by faith.

### D. God hears prayers.

*“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers”* (1 Pt 3:12). By this statement of Peter, we understand that God hears and answers the prayers of the saints. He

may not answer the prayers **when** we think they should be answered. But He answers. He may not answer them **how** we think they should be answered. But He answers. It is a walk of faith to trust in God to answer our prayers. Paul trusted in God to answer Philemon's prayers for his deliverance from prison (Pl 22). We must have such trust today. He had faith that God would answer the Colossians' prayers concerning the possible opening of a door of opportunity for the preaching of the gospel (Cl 4:3,4). The point is that Paul knew that God answered prayers, though he could not say that the answers were miracles that confirmed him to be a messenger of God.

David prayed that the counsel of Ahithophel be turned into foolishness (2 Sm 15:31,34). God non-miraculously answered this prayer (2 Sm 16:23; 17:1-7,14). David's deliverance from the counsel of Ahithophel happened. However, only by faith did David perceive that it was God working in the circumstances around Ahithophel to deliver him from the treachery of Ahithophel. God worked. But this work in answer to David's prayer was not a miracle according to the biblical definition of miracle. How God worked in this case is not for us to understand. We trust, therefore, that God can do the same today without working a visible miracle in order to rob us of our walk by faith. By faith we trust in His providence in our lives to answer our prayers.

### E. God provides.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Give us our daily bread" (Mt 6:11,26-33). God provides in a non-miraculous manner to give daily bread. In contrast to this, he provided bread in a miraculous manner for four and five thousand men on different occasions during the ministry of Jesus (Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; see also Jn 6:31). He miraculously gave manna and quail to the children of Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness (Ex 16). However, God does not provide our bread today in a miraculous manner as He did in the cases of feeding Israel in the wilderness or the groups of four and five thousand during the ministry of Jesus. Nevertheless, we are still instructed to pray for our daily sustenance. We trust in God's providence to continually supply our daily bread, though we do not understand how this is done (See Lk 22:35; 2 Co 9:8-10).

### F. God gives wisdom.

This point may not properly go under the heading of "providence." However, in our discussion of God's ways that are past finding out (Rm 11:33), we should mention James' statement that we ask for wisdom. "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (Js 1:5). Within the existence of the Father and Son "*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Cl 2:3). Joseph was given of this "*wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh*" (At 7:10). But this wisdom came

in a non-miraculous manner. Nevertheless, because James said that we must pray for wisdom we are assured that our prayers for such are answered when we thus pray. We do not know how God gives this wisdom. But we do know that it does not come to us according to the natural process of study and life experience. This giving of wisdom is not miraculous in the sense that we do not consciously through the senses experience a sudden expansion of wisdom. The reception of the wisdom, therefore, would not be called miraculous. It would be the work of God to work in our lives apart from natural laws in order to aid the influence of His saints.

The providential work of God is not dependent upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God works in all the world, not just in the life of the Christian. God also works regardless of one's views of the indwelling and work of the Spirit in the lives of the saints. In the debate over the "how" and "means" of the Holy Spirit's indwelling there are those who have affirmed that the power of God is somehow limited to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, God has non-miraculously worked since the beginning of the world, long before the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.

One's supposed misunderstanding of the indwelling of the Spirit will never hinder God's work in one's life. **We must understand that God is going to work regardless of our lack of knowledge or misunderstandings of His work.** Re-

gardless of our understanding of the providential work of God, God is still going to do what must be done in the world and in our lives to bring the saints to glory. This is how God works. The disciples' misunderstanding of the kingdom in Acts 1:6 did not deter God's foreplanned outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. Therefore, God will do His work regardless of our feeble understanding of His purposes and work. We must remember that even Paul did not understand all of God's workings, and yet, God was working in his life (Ep 3:20).

God's work is not limited to a "base of operation." In other words, the Holy Spirit does not have to be in a specific location before He can do His work. This is a common misunderstanding when we argue concerning the indwelling of the Spirit as opposed to the belief that the Spirit indwells through the medium of the revealed word. The fact is that we cannot place God here or there, for it is in Him that we live and move and have our being (At 17:28). He does not exist because we exist. We exist because He exists. His presence, therefore, is not limited to our existence. We are not the "base of operation" from which the Holy Spirit works.

Regardless of our personal understanding on the subject of indwelling, the belief that the Spirit works only from the limits of His indwelling in the saints infringes on the power of God to work anywhere and through anyone. If we say that the Spirit does not work outside the personal presence of the ones in whom He dwells, then we have limited the "area"

of the Spirit's work. Even if one claims that the Spirit cannot fully work in one's life without literally being inside the person, then we are saying that the Spirit's power is limited if He does not have direct residence. However, we must understand that the Spirit can operate with the same power from a distance of one millimeter, as well as a distance of ten thousand kilometers. It is **in Him** that we move and have our being. God is not limited to distance. Jesus could cure the centurion's servant whether He was by the bedside or in another city several kilometers from the sick servant (Lk 7:1-10). The questions concerning the Spirit's work, therefore, are not directly connected to the indwelling. These are two different discussions. Unless one can

separate these discussions, he or she will always have difficulty understanding the work and indwelling of the Spirit. Though we may not agree, Marion Fuchs concluded,

Those who limit the power of God by saying he must indwell literally are the ones who deny his power. Jesus worked miracles from a distance (John 4:50-51) and certainly the providence of God can be accomplished from a distance. God works providentially through non-Christians today (Rm. 13:1-7). Certainly the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a non-Christian and therefore providence and the indwelling are different spheres of operation for the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

## Chapter 8

### God's Medium Of Work

We do not presume to understand how God works in our lives in order to answer our prayers. We do not understand how He works in the world in which we live in order to bring about the purpose for which this world was created. We must allow God to work out His plan according to His will. Though we may not understand how God works, we do know what the Bible says concerning His work. Therefore, we must allow the Bible to explain the work of God. Since the Bible is God's explanation concerning His activities in the affairs of man, then we must accept the fact that God is working according to what He has said He will do.

#### A. God works through the medium of angels.

The Hebrew writer stated, "*Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*" (Hb 1:14). This passage alone in the New Testament states that angels do in some way work as ministering spirits on behalf of the saints. We know that their appearance is not knowingly miraculous in our sight. We trust that God works through the medium of angels to work all things together for good (Rm 8:28). When Jesus told of the events of the rich man and Lazarus, He

stated that when Lazarus died, angels carried him away to Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22). Could we infer from this that there are angels present at the time of the death of a saint? If they are there in the presence of the living, our sense perceptions are unable to detect them. Nevertheless, through faith we believe that God is working through His angels on our behalf.

## **B. God works through the medium of the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*" (Jn 7:38). John explained what Jesus meant by this statement. "*But this He [Jesus] spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*" (Jn 7:39). In the statement of John 7:38 Jesus was promising a "time (age) of the Holy Spirit." This time or age would begin miraculously with the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2, as well as His miraculous work through the early Christians (Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4). Though the Spirit worked miraculously in the lives of the early messengers of the gospel in order to confirm the spoken word of God, we would assume that He did not cease to work. Simply because He ceased to work miraculously when the word of God was confirmed does not mean that He has terminated His work.

We must assume that the Spirit continues to be the medium through which

the Father providentially works in a non-miraculous manner today. The Father is given credit for the origin of truth in inspiration (Jn 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tm 3:16). The same would be true of the Spirit's work in His time. In this way the Spirit would be the medium through which the Father works in a providential way today. Though the Spirit works non-miraculously throughout the world today, He still works on behalf of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the age or time of the work of the Spirit. And thus, Deity works through the medium of the Spirit today in order to bring about the purpose for which all things have been created.

## **C. God works through the medium of the inspired word.**

God's work in the life of a Christian through inspired revelation (the word of God) is real and actual. Jesus commanded the apostles to **teach** the disciples "*all things that I have commanded you*" (Mt 28:20). Therefore, Paul declared to the churches "*the whole counsel of God*" (At 20:27). God builds up churches through the work of the word of God on the hearts of men. God works in our lives through the inspired Scriptures in the following ways:

**1. God works through the personal knowledge the individual Christian has of the Scriptures.** When Paul left Ephesus he did not commend the church unto the Holy Spirit. He commended them to God and the inspired word. "*I commend*

you to God and **to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**" (At 20:32). It is this word that the Thessalonians received and which "effectively works in you who believe" (1 Th 2:13). This medium of God's work in our lives is **indirect**. However, it is a **directly inspired word** which was given in order to indirectly build up the church. Those who remain ignorant of the word of God are quenching the Holy Spirit's work in their lives through His word. Those who refuse to study the Bible will be tossed to and fro in a world of religious error (Ep 4:14). It is necessary, therefore, that every Christian arm himself with a knowledge of the word of God in order to quench the fiery darts of the devil who seeks to lead us into destruction. Because of their ignorance of His will, God said of Israel, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children*" (Hs 4:6).

**2. God works through the saints' mutual application of the word of God to their lives.** Christians are people who have submitted to the inspired word of God. Jesus said, "**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed**" (Jn 8:31). Because we have mutually submitted our lives to the word of God, we have a responsibility to "*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works*" (Hb 10:24). We "*bear one another's burdens ...*" (Gl 6:2). When

we allow the word of Christ to dwell in us by our submission to its principles and values, we are able to affect the lives of others. This is certainly why Paul commanded, "**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another ...**" (Cl 3:16). In this way, therefore, God works in each Christian's life through the **influence** of other Christians.

It is not reasonable to conclude that God works in the individual Christian's life **only through the revealed word**. Paul said, "*The things which you learned and accepted and heard and saw in me, do ...*" (Ph 4:9). Paul's life, therefore, was an influence on the Philippians' lives. He expected them to "*imitate me [Paul], just as I also imitate Christ*" (1 Co 11:1). This is why Paul told Timothy to "*be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*" (1 Tm 4:12). God works in our individual lives by the example we are to follow in one another. This is a teaching of the Holy Spirit. In other words, insofar as your life is patterned after Christ, one should seek to follow your example. Christians should seek to follow the example of one another's lives as their lives conform to the image of Christ that is explained in the word of God.

**Deism** is the teaching that God wound up the universe like a clock and then went off somewhere in the universe to watch it run down. Though the physical universe is winding down according to the second law of thermodynamics, it is held together by a transcendent God



and His direction through His word (Hb 1:3). In other words, as a lighted fire burns out and cannot be started again with the burnt ashes (the second law of thermodynamics), so this physical world is burning out. Nevertheless, we should not look at the universe as a wound up clock. It would be better to see it as an **electric clock** with an Eternal Power Source. Certainly, the clock is **wearing out**, but it is not winding down. It continues to tick away because God continually upholds "*all things by the word of His power*" (Hb 1:3). At some time in the future, God will disconnect the power source and the "*heavens will pass away with a great noise*" (2 Pt 3:10).

God, therefore, works in and with His creation. In miracle He directly worked in order to manifest His presence for specific purposes. This work was both visible and instantaneous. In providence He continues to work to bring about His eternal purpose (Ep 3:11). This manner of work is not visible. It is not instantaneous according to our sense perceptions.

If we maintain the position that God works indirectly and through means to change the moral behavior of man, we are not deists. God does not have to work **openly** and **directly** in order to prove that He is here. If one needs a miraculous manifestation in order to have proof that God is near, then he or she is asking for more than what God promised. The lack of faith that moves some to cry out for a miracle moves them to create a god after their own desires and image. These miracle seekers label as deists all who do not believe or who have not "experi-

enced" God's work as they have supposedly experienced it. The fact is that if we seek to walk by faith, we remain more blessed than those who claim to have experienced an open manifestation of God. We thus seek to believe without the miracle. We ask God to hold the miracles in order that He not steal away our blessedness.

We must remind ourselves that we are Bible students who do not determine Bible teaching in an experiential manner. In other words, what one emotionally experiences **does not** determine the biblical teaching on any matter. We must maintain this position simply because it is a biblical principle that it is "*not in man who walks to direct his own steps*" (Jr 10:23). The heart of the matter, therefore, cannot be the heart of man. It must be something stable. That stable standard is the unchanging word of God. It must be investigated. All religion, all teaching and all experience must be measured by this rule. Since the word of God has come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then all our emotions and feelings must be brought into judgment by the word of God.

Some have misunderstood the teaching that God works on the heart of man "through the word of God." Those who teach that God works to change the heart of man through word of revelation do not believe that God is distant. God is transcendent. He intervenes in His creation. He involves Himself in His creation. He has worked directly in the past through miracles and the revelation of the written word. He continues to work today

through His providential work behind the scenes of nature. **However, when it comes to affecting the actual moral conduct of man's heart, we must affirm that man must bring his life into agreement with God's law by free-morally submitting to the revealed word of God.** Christian brotherhood will play an important role in one's submission. Nevertheless, one brother cannot force another brother to submit to the will of God. One's submission in order to change his moral behavior must be voluntary and come from a sincere heart of obedience in gratitude of the grace of God.

We have not seen God work through miracle. We stand "more blessed" because of the lack of such an experience (Jn 20:29). Nevertheless, miracles were recorded in the Bible in order that we might believe (Jn 20:30,31). And thus, our lives are changed because we believe in the miracles of the Bible. In this sense God works through His word to strengthen our faith and give us hope for the future. We seek after one another's example and fellowship. In this way God is working through the example of the lives of fellow Christians in order to encourage us to remain faithful. We also witness world events that work for the proclamation of the gospel. Through faith we interpret such events as the providential work of God to bring about His purposes. Thus God is seen as working indirectly through events. There are also those good things that happen for which there is no human explanation. We are driven by faith to accredit these events

to the work of God. "**For Perhaps**" as Paul said, they are the work of God who is carrying out His will in our lives (Pl 15).

We believe, therefore, that God works. He works "*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think ...*" (Ep 3:20). **All such works are indirect in relation to our moral behavior.** However, because of faith which is produced by our knowledge of God's record of work (Rm 10:17), we morally respond by faith in a positive way to God's providential work in our lives. In this way God works on the heart of man. In this way one free-morally changes his heart to conform to the direction of the Holy Spirit's inspired word.

In view of the above, I would add that God's providential work is not connected to His saving and sanctifying the saint. The Holy Spirit works through the medium of the inspired word of God in order to bring one to the point where he must obey the gospel (Rm 6:3-6; 1 Co 15:1-4). In one's acceptance of Jesus as Lord of his or her life, he or she must then voluntarily submit to the word of Jesus as the guiding influence of life. Ernest Harper was right when he said,

Let us not confuse the function of the Holy Spirit in the "saving and sanctifying process of man" with God's "**providential workings**" in the affairs of the world in which man lives and is involved .... God's providential workings are in an entirely separate field of operation from that of the Holy Spirit's working in God's "personal salvation process" of man's soul.<sup>7:103</sup>

I would also question the claim that God providentially leads one to Christ. This does not mean that God cannot do such. I would simply question this in view of the fact that there are millions of people in the world who have never heard the name of Jesus. If these millions could somehow providentially have an evangelist sent to them, thousands undoubtedly would obey the gospel. However, many of these thousands who would have responded will experience the sting of death without ever having the privilege of hearing the gospel. For this reason, I

question the teaching that God shows respect of persons by singling out those to whom He would make it possible to hear the gospel. Harper added,

When God feels it is the right time for his “providential actions” in the affairs of both men and nations, he acts, but never to affect man’s “personal salvation.” God’s actions may “result” in man’s learning that he should be saved, but God does not **force** man, nor does he “**do it for man.**” Nor does his providence **instruct** man **how** to be saved.<sup>7:106</sup>