

**DICKSON**  
**THE HOLY SPIRIT**  
**and the**  
**CHURCH TODAY**



**Divine Help In The  
Wilderness Of Life**

# **The Holy Spirit And The Church Today**

**– Divine Help In The Wilderness Of Life –**  
**Roger E. Dickson**

## **CONTENTS**

### **Introduction – 5**

- 1 – *The Direct Work Of God* – 9**
- 2 – *The Indirect Work Of God* – 19**
- 3 – *Work Of The Spirit Through Revelation* – 26**
- 4 – *The Power Of The Word Of God* – 40**
- 5 – *The Power Of The Gospel* – 46**
- 6 – *Examples Of Conversion* – 51**
- 7 – *The Language Of Indwelling* – 57**
- 8 – *Key Concepts* – 63**
- 9 – *The Indwelling God* – 70**
- 10 – *The Indwelling Spirit Of God* – 77**
- 11 – *Key Statements On The Indwelling* – 85**
- 12 – *Indwelling Truth Of The Gospel* – 92**
- 13 – *Answered Prayer (Part I)* – 97**
- 14 – *Answered Prayer (Part II)* – 103**
- 15 – *Marginalizing Gospel Power* – 114**
- 16 – *Continuing Gospel Power* – 119**
- 17 – *The Means Of Sanctification*– 127**
- 18 – *Strengthening By The Spirit* – 133**
- 19 – *Comforted By The Spirit* – 139**
- 20 – *Leading Of The Spirit Into Fruit* – 144**
- 21 – *Work Against The Holy Spirit* – 153**

---

**22 – *Understanding Revelation* – 159**  
**23 – *The Communication Of God* – 164**  
**24 – *Understanding The Bible* – 173**  
**25 – *Cessation Of Revelation* – 179**  
**26 – *The True Confirming Miracle* – 186**  
**27 – *Cessation Of Confirming Miracles* – 195**  
**Bibliography – 205**  
**Research – 207**  
**Abbreviations – 208**

**rdickson@mweb.co.za**  
**www.africainternational.org**  
**www.blog.africainternational.org**  
**Facebook: Africa International.org**  
**Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa**  
**Copyright 1995, Revised edition: 2019, Africa International Missions**  
**Scripture quotations from *New King James Version***  
**Cover theme: *THIRSTING* (Sossusvlei, Namibia - R.E.D.)**

## PREFACE TO THE QUADRILOGY

The original material of this quadrilogy of books on the Holy Spirit was first published as one volume in 1995. That first volume was the culmination of several years of study on the subject. In order to produce the original volume, I researched several leading authors on the subject at that time in order to write a resource book that covered most of the topics that dealt with any studies of the Holy Spirit. That single volume eventually became a textbook for four courses for the International Bible Institute, and thus, it served several thousand Bible teachers around the world.

Since the first publication of the material in 1995, subsequent revisions have been made, plus the addition of new material on the subject. The original volume has since developed into a quadrilogy of four books that are now published as e-books on the internet, as well as in the printed *Biblical Research Library* volume. The e-book editions offer Bible students throughout the world material on the Holy Spirit that they would not normally be able to access from most books that are published today on the subject.

The original resources that I researched for the material of these volumes are in many cases out of print. Those resources were published long before the electronic publication of books. They were published years before the existence of the internet. Unfortunately, most of those very valuable resources are now out of print. Nevertheless, some of the thoughts of those early authors on the Holy Spirit have been preserved through quotes throughout the four volumes of this quadrilogy.

Since many of the books that are published today on the Holy Spirit are often filled with experiential validation of what a particular author feels is the truth of the matter in reference to the Holy Spirit, I believe that this volume will present a very valuable resource for Bible study on the subject in the years to come. Contrary to the books of many au-

thors today on this subject, the reader will immediately discover that in my study of the Holy Spirit, I am not concerned about personal experiences in reference to the Holy Spirit. I am interested only in what the biblical text actually states on the matter.

For the preceding reason, I do not apologize for the analytical approach to the material of this series of books. Because much of the in-depth studies of these volumes will not be sourced from most books today on the Holy Spirit, I have deemed it necessary to provide the availability in the field of Bible study material a strict interpretation of the text of the Bible. The reader might find some of the material tedious to read and study. Nevertheless, because the material of this series of books is not discovered in those shallow books on the Holy Spirit that move the readers into a realm of personal speculations, it has been my desire to bring the thinking of Bible students into the text of the word of God. We have a right to speculate on matters about which there is no concrete revelation. However, we must remember that our speculations must always be grounded in what the Bible actually says about the matter.

I would challenge every Bible student to consult my conclusions on all matters in reference to the being and work of the Holy Spirit. My challenge is that every conclusion to which one might come, must be firmly grounded in the word of God. If our speculations are simply conjectures of religious experientialism, then one has left the authority of the Bible in matters of faith. Subsequently, we have become our own authority, and thus, we have established another religion that is based on the thinking of man, and not on the word of God. If you are out there somewhere searching for answers in order to be drawn back to the word of God as the foundation of your faith, it is my prayer that these four volumes on the Holy Spirit will get you where God wants you to be in reference to faith.

## INTRODUCTION

**God works in the lives of Christians today. In the absence of the written New Testament documents for the first twenty to thirty years of history after the Pentecost of Acts 2, God worked miraculously in order to manifest His presence and to confirm His message and messengers of the gospel. He works today behind the scenes of natural law in order to accomplish His eternal purpose to bring His people into eternal dwelling. God works today through an indwelling relationship with His people in order that they live the gospel of freedom from sin and religion.**

**He works through the medium of the Spirit-inspired word of the Scriptures in order to direct the Christian's moral behavior. Since God has chosen to morally lead us through the power of the gospel, we must assume that He has placed much emphasis on the Scriptures in order to mold gospel-obedient people for eternal dwelling. It is for this reason, therefore, that Christians must focus on a knowledge of the gospel that is revealed through the New Testament documents. It is this gospel that gives each disciple the initiative to apply to daily living the principles of the word of God.**

**However, our focus on the word of God does not displace the continued work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Spirit works not only through the influence of His inspired word, but also in ways that are beyond our knowledge. Therefore, through faith we understand that God the Holy Spirit is working in our lives in order to work all things together for our good and God's eternal destiny for us.**

The Holy Spirit is active in the world today. He is doing His work in the affairs of the world in order to bring about the purpose for which this world was created. That purpose was to bring faithful believers into an eternal kingdom rest with God in a heavenly environment. We may not understand all that the Spirit does in the

affairs of man, or in the affairs of our own lives. However, **our lack of knowledge of His work does not determine how the Spirit works or what He does to accomplish the purpose for which He has come into the lives of Christians.** Our knowledge of the work of the Spirit is not a regulator of His work. Therefore, re-

ardless of our knowledge or understanding of His work, He will do what needs to be done in order to accomplish the eternal purposes of God.

Our questions concerning the work of the Spirit should not center around whether the Spirit works. The fact is that God the Spirit is at work in the world today. Our questions, therefore, should center around **how** He works, though we can never answer all our questions on this matter.

This is the gospel dispensation and it is in this age that the Spirit works in the life of Christians in order to glorify the reigning Lord Jesus Christ. How He goes about accomplishing this work is beyond our complete understanding simply because we are not God. Nevertheless, we do seek to know what He does in our lives. We seek to understand that our prayers are answered according to the will of God. Though we will never understand all the implications or manner by which He works, we do seek to understand what is revealed in the Scriptures concerning His work.

The Holy Spirit indwells the Christian. Our questions concerning this subject should not be based on whether the Spirit indwells. The New Testament clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit has an indwelling relationship with Christians. How the Spirit works in order to influence the moral behavior of man is an entirely differ-

ent subject. The work of the Spirit and the indwelling of the Spirit are subjects that are not dependent on one another. In other words, all that the Spirit does is not associated with an indwelling relationship with the believer.

The Spirit certainly works for the Christian, but He also works in the affairs of the world. All things are working together for the good of the Christian (Rm 8:28). But not all the work of God is directly associated with the life of individual Christians.

We must consider the fact that the concept of the indwelling of the Spirit refers to the Spirit's association with and work in reference to the life of the Christian. The Spirit's indwelling relationship with the Christian is the result of one's obedience to the gospel and subsequent covenant relationship with God.

Most of the confusion concerning the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit centers around the fact that we often do not ask or answer the right questions. Sometimes the questions are asked, but the answers are confusing. We have too often answered questions concerning the indwelling of the Spirit with answers that should be directed toward the work of the Spirit. The Scriptures teach that there is an indwelling presence of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. But we must determine if this indwelling

presence is a presence for work and influence, or simply a presence. If there is a difference between the work and indwelling of the Spirit, then the Christian can be indwelt by the Spirit, and yet, there be no work of the Spirit in one's life. For this reason, we must determine if the indwelling of the Spirit that is taught in the New Testament refers also to the Spirit's working in the Christian's life in order to bring about all things for our good. And, we must determine if indwelling means that the Spirit is at work in His relationship with the Christian regardless of the Christian's conscious recognition of the presence of the Spirit. We must determine if the Scriptures teach that the work of the Spirit today is limited to His indwelling.

Much of the confused discussions concerning the Holy Spirit and His relationship with the Christian also centers around semantics. We often do not understand what we mean by the words we individually use in discussing the subject. For example, there are those who say that God is working. Others would say that the Spirit is working. Both parties affirm that "Deity" is working, though we do not seem to be able to say it in the same way. Regardless of whether we say that the Spirit is working, or God is working, the Spirit as God is working.

Most people who have at least an elementary knowledge of the Scriptures understand that God the Spirit is working in the life of the Christian. How we express this work may differ from one person to another. Regardless of our different ways of expression, we must first allow the Scriptures to determine our vocabulary.

When considering this subject, we must all agree that we are not deists. We all agree that God the Spirit is working in the affairs of our world in order to bring about His purpose for this world. After all, Paul clearly wrote the following in reference to the work of God in our world:

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory" (Ep 3:20,21).*

The following chapters center around the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Everyone agrees that God works today through the word of revelation. A primary work of the Spirit at the beginning of this gospel dispensation was to inspire the holy writers of the New Testament to bring into existence the New Testament Scriptures. Therefore, it is the work of the Spirit to work continually throughout history through the medium of these

Scriptures in order to transform the lives of men and women through their gospel-obedient relationship with God.

However, God the Holy Spirit also works behind the scenes of natural law in order to bring about the eternal purpose of God for His people. The Father, Son and Spirit are working as one to accomplish the eternal plan of gospel redemption in order to bring obedient believers into eternal dwelling. Much of the work of God

today is not exclusively through His word. Therefore, we cannot say that God works only through the word of God in order to carry out His purpose for the creation of the world.

God simply works in the affairs of His creation. Though we will not understand all the implications of His work, our lack of understanding does not limit His work. Christians must be assured that the Spirit will do His work in their lives regardless of their understanding of His work.

## Chapter 1

# THE DIRECT WORK OF GOD

God works in the affairs of man. Because we live in a material world that is controlled by natural laws, God has limited Himself as to how He will affect this world. In order to protect natural law, He now limits Himself in order not to be manifested in a miraculous manner. The fact that God exists in a nonmaterial, supernatural environment, and we in a material, non-miraculous environment, assumes that there is a difference in how God works in our world.

We find it difficult to understand God's environment because of our shallow earthly understandings. In fact, it is impossible for us to fully understand God and His environment simply because we do not have the ability to transcend our own physical world. Our understanding of all things is limited to the physical world in which we live. We would be presumptuous, therefore, to think that we can understand that which is beyond our world by using the definitions of our words that are defined by our world experiences.

It is God who is transcendent. He must, and can cross over to our environment in order to affect our world. We call this intervention of the supernatural into our world to be "miracle."

We identify this as miracle simply because any incursion of the environment of the supernatural into the natural is above this natural world. Such intervention is beyond explanation with reference to our natural laws and human experiences. We call God's intervention into our physical world miracle because His intervention is above or outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws.

When God **directly** intervenes in our world, therefore, miracle occurs. However, miracle does not occur at random. Miracle always occurs for a specific purpose. It is occasional in the sense that God does not manifest Himself through miracle unless His purposes are to be accomplished.

Before our future existence in heaven, it is not God's purpose to place us in a supernatural environment that protects us from our present physical environment and ordinary occurrence of natural laws. It is necessary, therefore, that God limit Himself. He must limit Himself as to how He intervenes and how often He intervenes. In this sense, therefore, God must "distance" Himself from our world, and yet stay close.

He is the God who is here, not there. In Him we live, move and have

our being. However, He is the God who veils Himself behind the cloak of natural law lest He spoil us with His environment. In other words, there would be no desire to go to heaven if we lived in heaven.

How, then, does God work? How much does He work? And how does He protect us from His direct influence in order not to weaken our faith by allowing us to walk in His supernatural environment? These are questions we seek to answer in order to understand God's purpose in His work of bringing obedient believers into eternal dwelling.

When God brushes aside the natural, and He lays bare His working hand. We then see Him "**directly**" through His miraculous work. It is not that we actually see Him, for He is spirit, and the material eye cannot see spirit (Jn 4:24). What occurs in the work of miracle, therefore, is that we openly see the **result** of His presence. Therefore, when we say that God works **directly**, we mean that He works in order to be empirically be-

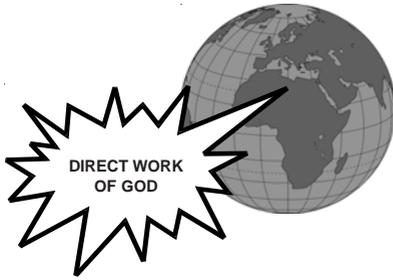
held by our natural eye.

God works **indirectly in order not to be seen by our natural eye**. By working indirectly, He also works through the course of nature in a way that we can perceive His work **only through faith**. This is not miracle, for miracle is supernatural because men can witness the miracle. God's work behind the scenes would be "miracle" in the sense that the natural course of nature is being manipulated by His power. Such work would be "miracle" because God has interrupted the ordinary course of nature. But from a strictly biblical definition, we could not define God's work behind the scene of natural law to be a confirming miracle simply because the Bible does not call this work miraculous.

Bible students often call God's work behind the scenes of natural law "**providence**." This is God working to provide; it is the Holy Spirit working in order to bring about the eternal purpose of God in our lives. This work is not the ordinary occurrence of natural law. However, it is not perceived by the senses of man, and thus, would not fall under the definition of a confirming miracle. But because we would not define such technically as a "confirming miracle," does not mean that God is not working.

In order not to work directly to





be perceived through the senses of man, God must work by means of **medium**. When God works through medium, man's faith is preserved. His faith is preserved in the sense that he is not walking by sight, **but by faith in the work of God behind the scene of natural law**. Man is thus given the responsibility to develop his spiritual character and faith in preparation for eternity.

However, when the Holy Spirit worked in creation with the physical world, **He worked directly in order to bring about a direct change in the physical environment (Gn 1:2)**. This would be miracle. Any direct work of the Spirit in the physical world is miracle. This work is clearly evident in the powers, wonders and signs that Jesus and the early disciples worked by the Holy Spirit in the first century. In fact, this work is described in the Bible as powers, wonders and signs simply because the work was openly manifested to those who beheld the work.

In reference to the moral behav-

ior of man, the Holy Spirit must also work through some means, and not directly on the heart of man. This is the central point that is open for discussion concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. It is often a difficult question to answer, and thus is given mixed answers. Answering it has caused differences of opinion among Bible students for decades. Whatever our answer might be in studying the Scriptures, we must answer in a way that guards the free-moral choice of each person.

If man's free-moral choice is attacked or questioned, then God's justice is questioned in final judgment. Therefore, we must be cautious with any answer concerning the work of the Spirit on the moral behavior of man, lest we attack the justice of God.

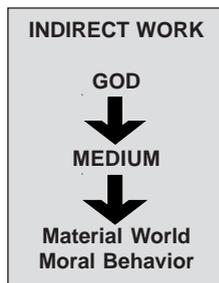
### A. Direct moral change:

**The Spirit can operate directly with an individual without morally changing that individual.** When the Spirit miraculously influenced people through the miraculous gifts, the result was immediate and instantaneous, though the moral behavior of the individual was untouched. For example, Peter preached the truth of the gospel by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, he still lacked boldness in Antioch to stand up against legalistic brethren from Jerusalem (Gl

2:11-13). We must conclude from this case that the Spirit did not work directly upon Peter's heart in order to miraculously make a change in his moral character. This change was his responsibility.

Another example would be when the Spirit worked directly through Timothy in order to preach the truth of the gospel. However, Timothy did at one time lose his boldness, and subsequently he neglected his gift that came to him through the laying on of Paul's hands. Paul had to write to him and encourage him to stir up the miraculous gift that he had received by the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Tm 1:6). In this, and many other cases, the Spirit did not work directly to change the moral character of individuals.

In reference to the miraculous work of the Spirit through the miraculous gifts, the Spirit was subject in His work to the one who possessed the miraculous gift (1 Co 14:32). The Corinthian disciples exercised their gifts of the Spirit among themselves. However, they used their gifts in a manner that manifested pride and division. Paul said that they were carnal (1 Co 3:1-3). The Spirit thus worked among them, but He did



not miraculously change them into being humble and a united people. Paul's letter to the Corinthian disciples is evidence that proves that the Spirit did not miraculously change moral behavior even though He worked miraculously among the early Christians. There is no greater evidence in the New Testament that proves that the Spirit does not work directly, and thus, miraculously change the moral behavior of an individual, than the case of the Corinthian disciples who had some serious problems with their pride and competition in reference to the miraculous gifts.

If the Spirit works directly, then His work is miraculous. In the work of God, the direct work of God means miraculous according to the understanding of man who lives in subjection to natural laws. In other words, **the change that does not follow the normal course of nature, and is visual to man as instantaneous with purpose, is defined as a confirming miracle.** In the same sense, the change that is beyond the normal ability of man in the moral realm, and is visual and instantaneous with purpose, would be miracle. In other words, if a person were hateful, and then in a moment of time was made loving, such would appear to be miraculous because the change would be beyond one's normal ability to change instantaneously. However, the change

that comes over an individual upon repentance and conversion, is truly wonderful. Nevertheless, we could not conclude that the Holy Spirit subjectively made this change in a miraculous manner, and thus, instantaneous. The fact that the individual continues to struggle over weeks and months in order to bring his attitude and body into subjection to the will of God proves that it is the individual, under the direction of the Spirit-inspired word of God, who must struggle to morally change in character and attitudes.

If the work of changing moral behavior were miraculous, then the Spirit would do an instantaneous change when one came out of the grave of baptism. This would be truly miraculous and would fall under the purpose for which miracles were worked and defined. The miraculous, and thus instantaneous change, would prove to the unbeliever that the Spirit was working directly on the heart of man.

In the religious world it is affirmed that radical change in one's personality and character takes place in the hearts of the truly "converted." However, the problem in associating this with the miraculous work of the Spirit is the fact that this change takes place over a period of time. This may be a brief period, but it is not instantaneous and in a moment of time as

the occurrence of a confirming miracle. Some religious people have changed their lives from the most wicked to the point of being very spiritually minded individuals. As a result of their "conversions," they abound in the fruit of the Spirit. We certainly could not deny their tremendous spiritual change and growth. Such is real and actual.

**However, would we affirm that the Spirit is working directly in those who have not obeyed the gospel in order to change their moral behavior?** If not, then to what would we accredit their change? We would answer that man has the ability through belief and moral conviction, to make personal changes in his or her moral behavior. We have the mental ability within ourselves to radically change our moral behavior through the application of moral principles. The spiritual lives of priests and religious leaders of non-Christian religions is a testimony to this fact. The testimony of non-Christian people to do the same as the Christian is evidence that man can make great moral changes in belief and behavior. This is not miracle. It is not the Holy Spirit working directly to change an individual, though it is claimed to be such by those in the religious world who have not obeyed the gospel.

To assert the above interpretation of the work of the Spirit on the moral

behavior of man through one's obedience to the directions of God is not legalism. It is not legalism to obey the commandments of God in order to bring about moral change in our behavior. Obedience to God's word does not mean that one is meritoriously working for his salvation. Neither is this obedience to the word of God grounds for boasting about what one does in obedience to God. In fact, growth in the virtue of humility would certainly not lead to one's boasting that he has grown in humility. **It is natural to give all credit to God for growth in the fruit of the Spirit.** This is true because it is our individual response to the gospel of Jesus Christ that stimulates our spiritual growth.

The preceding is exactly what Paul wrote in the context of Colossians 3. "*If you then were raised with Christ [from the waters of baptism], seek those things that are above*" (Cl 3:1). Paul continued, "*Put to death your members that are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*" (Cl 3:5). Paul continued with other things in Colossians 3 that Christians must struggle to put on and put off in reference to their character development. These are not things that the Spirit will miraculously do in our lives. These are responsibilities of the Christian when he or she comes into Christ. This is a lifetime respon-

sibility of moral development.

Paul said, "**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**" (Ph 2:12). He did not say "work for" your salvation with fear and trembling. The Christian is saved. He must work out his salvation in the sense of working in response to what God has done for him through the gospel of grace that was revealed on the cross, which gospel he has obeyed (See 1 Co 15:10; Ti 2:11). Therefore, it is not meritoriously legalistic to work in response to what God has done for us. The Christian has been saved, and thus it is only natural for him to obey in response to God's grace.

We recognize that there are many religious people who believe in salvation by faith alone, and as a result, they excel in the fruit of the Spirit. They often excel beyond Christians who have obeyed the gospel. However, we would not say that the Spirit is working in the life of the one who is not in a covenant relationship with God through his obedience to the gospel. If we affirm that the Spirit directly touches the moral behavior of man in order to change his character, then we are faced with a dilemma. If the Spirit directly changes the heart of the believer, then why does He not produce in the Christian's life a greater spiritual dedication or goodness than that which is often wit-

nessed in the lives of those who are not in a covenant relationship with God through obedience to the gospel? Why are some Buddhist and Hindus morally righteous, but have not obeyed the gospel?

Could it be that we have missed the point of how the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in the character of the Christian? Could we be believing something that the Spirit does not actually do?

Regardless of our answer to these questions, we must face the fact that there are many great spiritually minded and faith-oriented religious people in the world who often put Christians to shame in many areas of commitment and evangelistic fervor. There are thousands of Buddhist and Hindus of non-Christian religions who have great devotion, love, joy, peace, and gentleness in their lives. However, they do not have the Spirit because they have not obeyed the gospel. How do they develop these personal characteristics without the Spirit?

**If the Holy Spirit operates directly on the moral character of the Christian, then why are not Christians committed beyond what is witnessed in the religious world?** In our discussions with some concerning the work of the Spirit on the moral behavior of man, we have often found that Christians usually do not like to

discuss this point. When the point is brought up, there is usually no answer given. Preconceptions of how the Spirit is supposed to work on the moral behavior of the Christian has often made it impossible for one to give an objective answer. Nevertheless, the question of spiritual growth among those who are not in a covenant relationship with God must be discussed and answered. Refusing to answer the question and deal with the matter only manifests our refusal to be objective in allowing the word of God to give us an objective answer concerning how the Spirit goes about doing His work of changing the moral behavior of the saints in an indirect and non-miraculous manner.

We must add here an observation. During a crusade, campaign or gospel meeting, ten individuals, for example, might obey the gospel by immersion. One year later, however, five of these may have fallen away, or grown poorly in the faith. The other five may have excelled in spiritual growth, being fruitful in teaching and preaching. Has the Spirit succeeded in the latter group, but failed in the first group? How can we account for the difference between the two groups if we believe in a direct work of the Spirit on the heart of an individual? Jesus presented us with this challenge in the parable of the Sower (Mt 13:18-23,37-43). Only one-fourth of the soil

produced. What happened to the other three-fourths? Why would the Spirit fail to produce in the three-fourths, and succeed in only one-fourth?

Some have answered the above thoughts by saying that the Spirit works on the moral behavior of man as the individual free-morally allows Him to work. However, this seems to be an effort to dodge the question and an effort not to accept one's personal responsibility to submit his character to the will of God.

We may claim to have an inadequate understanding of some mysterious "direct" work of the Spirit on the moral behavior of man. Nevertheless, one's final position must conclude that man will be held accountable for any moral change in his life. He will be held accountable for his behavior (2 Co 5:10). If this is not true, then the five apostates of the first group who responded to the invitation at the campaign above have an excuse. The three-fourths of those represented by the unproductive soil of the parable of the Sower have an adequate excuse not to be condemned to hell (See Mt 13:3-8,18-23). Their excuse would be valid if they could claim that the Spirit did not sufficiently work directly in their lives to produce spiritual growth.

## B. Direct means miraculous.

**To operate directly means to operate miraculously.** How is the Spirit actually working on the moral behavior of the Christian? **We must understand that a direct operation of the Spirit apart from means is a miraculous operation.** We must keep in mind that direct means miraculous in relation to the work of God in the affairs of man. However, we must confess that God can work directly without our observation. The Holy Spirit could work directly on the planet Mars at this very moment. We would not perceive the work. Nevertheless, the direct contact and work would still be defined miraculous according to our biblical dictionary here on earth.

**DIRECT = "MIRACULOUS"**

The direct work of the Spirit simply means that something immediately happens in the material world. The same would be true in the spiritual world of the moral character of individuals. In the material world, something happens apart from the normal process of natural law. **Therefore, there is no such thing as a direct non-miraculous work of God.** All direct work of God is miraculous according to our judgment of the natural processes of natural laws and moral development, though we may not be present to see the miraculous

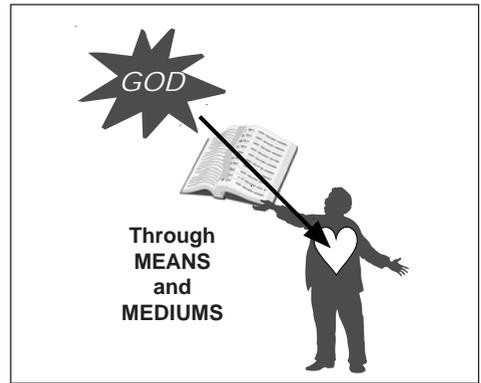
activity. It can be direct, and yet not perceived by our senses. But if it is a direct work of the Spirit in these matters, and thus miraculous, then the result of the direct activity of the Spirit must be instantaneous.

### C. Direct means Divine responsibility.

**To operate directly means that God is directly responsible.** God is responsible for the effect of any direct work. Therefore, if God operates directly on the heart of man, then God is directly responsible for the condition of the heart of the individual at any one time, specifically in final judgment. If the Christian falls, then God must accept some responsibility for ineffectively working on the moral behavior of the Christian in order to guarantee salvation. It is for this reason that God must work indirectly and through medium on the heart of man. When He works indirectly, and through means, **then man is held accountable for any insufficiency. Fallen Christians must be held fully accountable for their apostasy.**

### D. Direct means without means.

**To operate directly means to operate without means or medium.** God works through means or medium in order to conceal His working from



probable beholders. We call this “non-miraculous.” This is God working, but His working is concealed by the medium through which He works. His work is not **seen** (understood) by man to be miraculous. By working through medium on the moral behavior of man, God allows the free-moral individual Christian to respond voluntarily. When God works through the medium of the recorded gospel of grace in order to inspire spiritual growth, then those who walk by faith in the gospel are responsible for their own growth. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that we “*are not under law* [in order to meritoriously justify ourselves], *but under grace*” (Rm 6:14). For this reason, we walk by faith in the gospel of grace, and not by faith in our performance of law.

On the other hand, in a direct operation of the Spirit on the heart of man, the Spirit of necessity would miraculously change the moral behav-

ior of man, and do such instantaneously. However, in an indirect operation through the medium of revelation (the truth of the gospel), God allows the free-moral disciple to voluntarily respond to the gospel. Thus, free-moral agency is preserved and the justice of God is maintained without accusation.

Herein is revealed the power of the gospel in our daily living. It is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is the Christian's motivation to walk in gratitude of the incarnational offering of the Son of God on the cross. Our appreciation for this offering motivates spiritual change. This motivation keeps our minds focused on Christ, not on the Holy Spirit. And since it is the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ (Jn 16:14), then gospel focus, and not Spirit focus, must be the motivation by which we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

We must affirm, therefore, that the Spirit works on the moral character of man through medium. He works through a means of operation in order not to infringe on the free-moral choices of the individual. In this way, man's spiritual growth is subject to the free-moral choices of the individual. If Christians do not

grow in commitment and evangelistic fervor beyond the religious world in which they live, or non-Christian world, then only the individual Christian can be blamed. Religious commitment should be greater among true believers than among any man-made religion of this world.

So how does one give credit to the Spirit for spiritual growth? The answer is simple. We cannot take credit for being directed toward a certain goal if we have not established the goal or the route to follow in order to reach the goal. Through the Spirit, the goal of eternal life has been revealed. Through the Spirit, the knowledge of what is expected of us by God has been revealed. When we act on this knowledge in response to the gospel, how can we take credit for arriving at the goal?

Since we cannot reach the goal of eternal life either by meritorious good works or perfect keeping of law, then all credit must be given to God when we arrive. All credit must be given to the Spirit for informing us concerning all sign posts on the road to eternal life. It was through the Spirit that all means of reaching the goal have been granted to us (2 Pt 1:3). Therefore, it is the Spirit who accomplishes His work in us as we work out our salvation (Ph 2:12,13).

## Chapter 2

### THE INDIRECT WORK OF GOD

We now come to the moral behavior of man and how the Holy Spirit changes that behavior by His direction through the inspired word of God. The question here does not concern the location of the Spirit in indwelling. We are concerned about how the Spirit works in the Christian's life in order to bring the heart of God into one's life. We are specifically concerned about the influence of the Spirit on the heart of the believer.

All the unnecessary argument around locating the Spirit in reference to His work is of no consequence when considering the ministry of the Spirit. The subject of indwelling is very important. However, the real issue is how the Spirit works in order to influence the moral behavior of man. This work does not depend on any efforts to locate God the Spirit. This is the subject we must always keep in mind while discussing indwelling.

#### A. Limiting the Spirit's work.

**The Spirit's work is not limited by our knowledge of His work.** The Spirit works regardless of how we think He indwells the saints as far as location. The Spirit's work is neither

enhanced nor limited by the nature of His "personal" indwelling. His work in the Christian's life is not regulated by His location.

Neither is His work determined by our knowledge of how He works. God the Holy Spirit can work in this world from some distant corner of the universe. It is in Him that we live, move and have our existence. He works, therefore, regardless of our knowledge of how He works in our lives or where He might be.

The effect of His work is often defined as indwelling. The metaphorical use of the word "indwell" emphasizes the close working relationship that God the Holy Spirit has with those who have obeyed the gospel. However, we must not confine His work solely to the lives of Christians. God has always been transcendent in His creation. He still works among the nations of the world in order to bring about His purpose for the creation of this world. He is working all things together for good for the believer (Rm 8:28).

God's work is certainly not confined to the moral behavior of the believer. Therefore, to say that God's work in this world is confined to the location or presence of the believer is

a limited view of the totality of God's work. His ways are beyond our discovery and beyond our comprehension. Therefore, unless we take too much pride in our knowledge of His work, we would do well to caution ourselves about being too dogmatic in this area of study.

## **B. The Spirit guards free-moral choice.**

**The Spirit works in a way to guard free-moral choice.** The Spirit works on the moral behavior of man in an indirect manner, and thus, through means or mediums. If He worked directly, then He would work miraculously, and thus immediately. His direct and miraculous work would change our moral behavior to confirm completely to the will of God. But our righteousness was the work of the incarnate Son of God at the cross. We must be careful, therefore, not to assume that we are made more righteous by the influence of the Holy Spirit, lest we marginalize the imputed righteousness that was poured out at the cross, and which we enjoyed as a result of our obedience to the gospel.

Therefore, the Spirit works indirectly and through means in order to preserve the free-moral choice of each Christian, and thus, uphold the justice of God. In other words, through the means of natural law God has

worked in order to affect the material world around us. Such work is indirect. It is not miraculous. However, change did/does occur in the material world. In the same manner, God the Holy Spirit works through medium to change the moral character of each of us. How He does this is what we must determine. The fact that we spiritually grow in response to the gospel is true. Therefore, we must consider all influences that result in our spiritual growth.

## **C. The Spirit seeks to produce fruit.**

**The Spirit works in order to change moral behavior, or produce in us the fruit of the Spirit.** In the realm of the morality of man, the Spirit works through moral law in order to affect the moral behavior of those who have responded to the gospel. His work is **indirect**. It is through the medium of inspired words of instruction in the life of the one who believes.

Moral change in our lives does occur. However, such change is not miraculous in the sense that it is instantaneous. Through the means of intelligible communication of written words, the Spirit directs and leads the behavior of those who have willingly chosen to respond to the gospel.

To be more specific, the Spirit

operates upon the heart of the sinner and the saint today through the medium of revealed truth. Franklin Camp was correct in the following statement:

Before the New Testament was written, the Holy Spirit operated through inspired men. Now He operates through the inspired Book. Even when the Holy Spirit operated miraculously through inspired men, He did not operate in conversion and sanctification apart from the Word. The miraculous operation was to reveal the Word, by which the sinner was converted and the saint edified.<sup>1:16</sup>

#### **D. The Spirit's work is mysterious, but not mystical.**

**There is nothing mystically superstitious about the work of the Spirit.** There is nothing mystical about God's requirement that men morally obey His instructions. God has objectively laid before us His word, and thus He expects an objective response to His word.

One is not to seek for some nudge or inner feeling in order to conjure up something mystical. God strictly warned Israel not to involve herself in the mystical incantations of the occult world. These admonitions served a purpose because God knew

that He made man with the ability to search to the limit in all fields of imagination. The inquisitive nature of man leads him to reach to the lower depths of the sea. He must probe the outer limits of space. He is not satisfied unless he can break matter down to its most minute substance.

Men exercise the same inquisitiveness in the spirit world. We are driven to move our minds to the limit, even to the point of making the unreal seem real. For this reason, God warned Israel against inventing religions that were unreal. He warned Israelites against following the deceptions of their own imaginations (Lv 19:26,31; Dt 4:15-19; 18:9-14). It is for this reason that gospel living is an objective response to the instructions of God. We are not led by our imaginations, but by clearly stated principles of life in the word of God.

It is not that there is something there when one goes to the extent of his imagination. The fact is that God knew that He created man with the ability to conjure up something that was not real, but think that it was real. God made the mind of man with the ability to talk himself into believing something that was not real. For this reason, God warned man not to venture into the limits of his imagination. We must not conjure up in our minds something that is not real. When people do such, they only deceive

themselves into believing a lie.

God's warnings, therefore, were not based on the fact that what man would imagine was always real. God knew the ability of man to deceive himself. This ability of self-deception needed a bridle. For the Christian, that bridle is God's direction through revealed truth. When we forsake the objective guidance of the word of God, we leave ourselves open for the invention of countless religious deceptions (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

God's warnings about our self-deception do not presuppose that there is a real world of incantations out there for the discovery of the mystical mind. God knew that we would invent and deceive ourselves into believing that our mystical inventions were real.

Herein is the danger of mystical religions. Man would lead himself away from truth in order to follow his own inventions. The end of the journey of mystical religion always results in the invention of religious incantations. Israel went down this road of self-deception. We will go down the same road today if we do not hold tight to the direction of the word of God.

There is also the danger in mystifying Christianity. There are those under the umbrella of "Christianity" who would lead us to believe that there is something mystical about the

Holy Spirit and His work. The very mention of His name conjures up mystical emotions on the part of some. Thus under the banner of "Christianity," some have invented "christian" occults that are entirely foreign to the Scriptures.

A form of occult "Christian religion" has arisen in these days that mocks the idea of the Spirit limiting His work on the moral behavior of man to word of revelation. To some, this concept robs true faith of its mystery. But this is not true. There is a mystery about the work of God in the lives of Christians. His ways are beyond our comprehension. However, when it comes to understanding how God intended to influence our moral behavior, there is little mystery. There is little mystery in the statement of Jesus, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (Jn 14:15). Keeping the commandments of God is objective, not mysterious.

We surely cannot understand God's ways, for Scripture says that His ways are past finding out. His ways are mysterious, but not mystical. And we surely cannot understand all the workings of the Holy Spirit. However, those ways that **directly** affect us are clear. They are objective. We can know how God works in our lives in order to change our moral behavior.

Nevertheless, **God works**

**around us in a mysterious manner that cannot be defined by the words of our empirical dictionary.** This mystery does not frighten us. We know that God is here. He works. He affects our environment. We cannot explain His workings, for such workings are above our understanding. For this reason, they are mysterious. We would not rob Christianity of its mystery. On the other hand, we would not make it a mystical religion of notions and nudges.

We must not lead ourselves into a mystical “christianity.” What God would have us do in order to be saved and grow spiritually is not unclear in His word. We would not call upon some spiritualistic influence to do for us what God expects us to do for ourselves.

On the other hand, Christianity is not a mathematical equation of ritualistic performances. It is not a philosophical discipline of logic and humanism. God knew that our investigative minds would lead us out of control and away from Him if not controlled by word of revelation (2 Th 2:10-12). Therefore, He was clear and distinct in His word as to what we must do and be. He was clear as to how we would get to where



He wants us to be. V. E. Howard correctly stated,

Any theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit through miraculous intervention, separate and apart from the word of God, would nullify the cross and set aside the whole scheme of redemption, revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in the New Testament .... The Holy Spirit moves the mind and convicts the souls of man today, but not independent of the word of God. When man hears and obeys the gospel he hears and obeys the word of the Spirit. The word of God has always been the revelation of the Spirit, which man is obligated to hear and obey.<sup>3:13</sup>

### **E. The Spirit's work is not subjective.**

**The Spirit does not subject us to His influence.** Some believe that the Spirit “incubates” the word in order to empower its effect upon our soul. This concept was born out of John Calvin’s concept of total depravity. Calvin taught that the sinful nature of man made him nonresponsive to the law of God. In order for one to respond to God’s call through the word, the Holy Spirit had to be sent into the heart of man in order to activate the will of man to respond to God’s call through the gospel.

This concept of spiritual response is often brought over into the Christian's spiritual growth. In other words, in order for the Christian to spiritually grow, the Spirit must activate the word of God on the heart of man. Therefore, one supposedly cannot free-morally respond to the commands of God in order to grow into that which is required by God. The Spirit must ignite the influence of the instructions of God before there can be spiritual growth.

Those who believe that the Spirit works in conjunction with the word in order to activate its effectiveness in the life of the Christian are too often antagonistic to the position of those who affirm that the Spirit works on the moral behavior of man through the medium of the Scriptures. It is assumed that if one does not believe in the direct aid of the Spirit in spiritual growth, then he or she cannot adequately grow spiritually.

However, if one's knowledge of the Spirit's work on his moral behavior regulates the amount of spiritual growth the Spirit will generate, then the new convert, who has little knowledge of the word of God, has a problem. His lack of knowledge of the supposed activating work of the Spirit will hinder his spiritual growth until he discovers this supposed truth. In other words, the more one supposedly learns about the influence of the

Spirit, the more the Spirit can influence one's heart.

We must remember that God will save all those who believe and obey the gospel. He will save them regardless of their knowledge of great theological "truths" that we would demand that people know in order to grow spiritually. It is the gospel of Jesus that is the impetus to spiritual growth, not an outline of doctrine on the Holy Spirit.

Those who hear and obey the gospel will be saved. God pleads that sinners obey the gospel, and then respond to His word through the continuous work of the gospel in their life. He has not placed the responsibility for the salvation of the individual on the shoulders of the Holy Spirit. In other words, He does not demand of the Spirit that He work in conjunction with the word in order to prepare man for salvation. A century and a half ago, Alexander Campbell wrote,

With some, there is a sort of compound system, claiming both the Spirit and the Word—representing the naked Spirit of God operating upon the naked soul of man, without any argument, or motive, interposed in some mysterious and inexplicable way—incubating the soul, quickening, or making it spiritually alive, by a direct and immediate contact, without the intervention of one moral idea, or impression.<sup>4:361</sup>

No one has ever been able to explain how the Spirit works to empower the spiritual growth of the Christian in conjunction with the word. The fact that such a work cannot be explained by Scripture moves us to question this supposed influence of the Spirit. If the Spirit works in such a way as to empower the word of God in our lives, then we would assume that there would be some explanation of this influence in the word of God.

This would also lead us to assume that Noah, Abraham, Moses and a host of other heroes of faith did not have this advantage that Christians supposedly have today. In other words, if the Spirit is supposed to empower us in response to the word of God in order for us to grow spiritually, then we should have some advantage over the fathers of our faith, that is, over Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Such an assumption seems to be quite preposterous in view of the fact that the Hebrew writer referred to many of our fathers of the faith as examples that we should follow (See Hb 11).

Before we leave this subject, there is another important point to consider in reference to our focus as Christians. If one's primary focus in reference to spiritual growth is on the Holy Spirit, then he consequently focuses less on the gospel of the Lord

Jesus Christ. This is the reverse of what Jesus said in John 16:4, that is, when the Holy Spirit came, He would glorify Jesus, not Himself. Therefore, it seems that some have reversed this order of work of the Holy Spirit.

It is the focus of the Spirit to glorify the incarnate Son of God. Through His work of inspiring the recording of the gospel, it was the work of the Holy Spirit to focus our minds on the gospel of King Jesus. Our focus for spiritual growth, therefore, must be on the gospel. And since we focus on the gospel by means of the Spirit's written record of the gospel (the New Testament), then we must continually study the revelation of the gospel in the New Testament. Gospel living saints grow in the knowledge of the gospel, and thus live the gospel by the power and influence that the word of the gospel has on their lives.

We must remember that we are limited to the revelation of the Spirit in our understanding of the work of the Spirit. Our understanding of the Spirit's work, therefore, must be explained by the Spirit in the word of God. We know nothing of His workings other than what is revealed in the Scriptures. This is not a confining principle. It is a safe principle that God has set forth for believers to follow.

Because of our desire to create religions after our own desires, God has confined our understanding of the Spirit's work to His Scriptures. Those who would dare go beyond the Scriptures in order to assume all that God does, would fall under the indictment of 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. In this context Paul stated that because some did not have a love for the truth, they believed delusions.

Abiding in and believing the truth of the gospel deals with more

than one's beliefs. It deals with actions. Beliefs are the foundation for action. If one does not discipline his beliefs to what is revealed in Scripture concerning the gospel, invariably he will lead himself to wrong conclusions, and thus wrong actions. The disciple's mind must be directed by Scriptures in order to understand the gospel. When we focus on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in this way, the power of the gospel continues to build us up.

### Chapter 3

## WORK OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH REVELATION

The theology of many in the religious world concerning the influence or work of the Holy Spirit is based on the assumption that men are born with either a totally depraved or sinful nature. The belief that one has a totally depraved nature assumes that one cannot of his own free will respond to the revealed will of God. The basic problem with the theology of those who believe that we are born with a sinful nature is the assumption that men are inclined to do evil from the day of their birth. Those who assume this theology teach that a direct work of the Spirit in the life of both the unbeliever and believer is necessary in order for one to respond to the word of God. A direct operation of

the Spirit is necessary to move the sinner to respond to the spoken or written word of the gospel.

It is taught that a direct operation is necessary in the life of the saint in order to move the Christian to respond to the word in order that one sanctify his soul. Because of the erroneous understanding of the nature of man, the religious world continually sets forth erroneous teachings concerning the work and influence of the Holy Spirit. Most books on the subject of the Holy Spirit today are based on the assumption that the nature of man is sinful at the time of birth.

Some of the beliefs of the religious world concerning the work of

the Holy Spirit have been represented by some leading religious leaders. J. B. Moody taught “that man is so depraved that he is unable without a direct enabling power of the Holy Spirit to obey the Gospel of the Son of God.”<sup>5</sup> The *Baptist Church Manual* states ...

... that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is affected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with divine truth.<sup>6:49,50</sup>

N. L. Rice stated many years ago,

We believe and teach that in conversion and sanctification, there is an influence of the Spirit in addition to that of the Word and distinct from it. An influence without which the arguments and motives of the gospel would never convert and sanctify one of Adam’s ruined race.<sup>7:628</sup>

At a Mennonite General Conference many years ago, it was affirmed,

At conversion the Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer .... Therefore the Spirit progressively transforms him into the spiritual image of Christ and enables him to have victory over temptation. The Spirit makes possible growth in moral discernment ....<sup>8</sup>

The above statements represent the view of many in the religious world today who have taught for many years the direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the moral behavior of man. However, regardless of what is taught in the religious world concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, it is always our task to go to the Scriptures with an objective view in order to determine what the Spirit says He does in reference to our moral behavior. In view of the tremendous influence that the religious world places on the preceding erroneous ideas concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, it is our task to reevaluate the influence of the Spirit on the heart of man.

Our only textbook to discover how the Spirit influences the heart of man must always be the word of God. No position concerning the influence of the Spirit can be accepted that the Spirit Himself does not clearly explain for Himself in the Bible. We must limit our discussion on this subject, therefore, to the direction of the Bible, and thus guard ourselves against any outside influences concerning any person’s subjective experiences.

We cannot allow subjective religion to dictate our beliefs concerning the manner by which the Spirit works. In other words, one’s testimony of personal experiences must not be allowed to be evidence that the Spirit has been working directly in one’s

life. If such is allowed, then we are faced with the dilemma that the Spirit works in the life of unbelievers who have not obeyed the gospel.

Cornelius was a devout man of good character (At 10:1,2). However, he did not have the Spirit because he was not a gospel-obedient Christian. If the good character of those who have not obeyed the gospel becomes a standard by which we would prove the presence and work of the Spirit, **then we are forced to accept the teachings of those who profess good characters, and yet, have not obeyed the gospel.**

This discussion is not a study of the indwelling of the Spirit. How the Spirit works must never be dependent on our understanding of the indwelling. If one attaches the work of the Spirit in our lives to the personal indwelling of the Spirit, then he will be faced with the dilemma of confining the work of the Spirit to where he personally might be located. **The work of the Holy Spirit in this world is not confined, or limited, to the location of Christians in this world.**

We must not “localize” the presence of the Spirit in this world solely to the presence of the saints. This teaching would infringe on the omnipotence of God the Spirit. If one seeks to make the work of the Spirit dependent on the indwelling of the Spirit, then he is confining the work

of the Spirit to the presence and the immediate environment of those in whom He dwells. The Spirit works beyond the presence of Christians, and beyond the environment in which the Christian lives. We must keep in mind that it is in God that we live, move and have our being (At 17:28). It is not in us that He lives, moves and has His being. The Spirit worked in this world long before there was the first Christian.

Before we establish the basis or medium through which the Spirit influences our moral behavior, it is necessary to understand what is influenced and how it is influenced by the Spirit. Therefore, we must keep in mind that we are referring to the changing of the moral conduct or behavior of the Christian.

We must determine how God gives us knowledge of what we must do. We must then determine how this knowledge is revealed to those who have obeyed the gospel. We want to know how God has determined how we should know and obey His will after our response to the gospel.

We must set aside for a moment thoughts concerning an indwelling presence of the Spirit. We must do this in order to focus on how any individual can know what God requires concerning knowledge and obedience of His will.

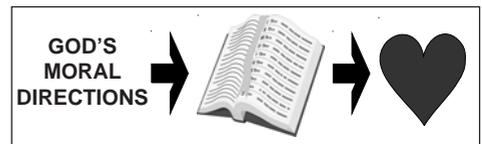
Many people confuse discus-

sions on the existence and work of the Spirit because of their reactions to alternative views concerning the Spirit. In their reaction, they fail to understand what the discussion is actually about when we speak of the influence of the Spirit. Therefore, we must keep in mind that the following discussion is first about how one discovers what is required by God in the life of a gospel-obedient disciple. Secondly, we must determine how one's knowledge of God's requirements are implemented in our behavior.

The Bible teaches that God has always worked through word of revelation in order to communicate to man what he must do to change his moral behavior in reference to the will of God. After all, we would not know what to do in obedience to God if He had not revealed His will to us in written form.

We cannot trust our own urges and impulses because such are subjective responses to our beliefs. For this reason, God has always communicated His will to man through words of instruction. Even before the word of God was written, God spoke through the Fathers of the families in order to communicate His instructions (Hb 1:1). God has never used subjective mystical urges and emotions in order to communicate to man that which is necessary to be obedient to Him.

Since God communicates to man through word of revelation, we must define what we mean by the influence of the Spirit on the heart of man. By **influence** we do not mean that the Spirit works through subjective mystical urges or impulses. The Spirit's influences are always the result of objective responses to the means or mediums by which the Spirit reveals the will of God. In the conversion of the sinner, the means of operation of the Spirit on the heart of the alien sinner is the recorded gospel that is revealed in the word of God. In the edification of the saint, God continues to work through the preaching and teaching of the gospel (See Rm 1:13-16).



The **direct** work of the Spirit refers to the Spirit working apart from means or medium in order to influence the heart of man. Through miracles, the Spirit worked directly on the material world. Through inspiration, the Spirit worked directly on the minds of men. However, with the moral behavior of man, we must affirm that the Spirit works through means or medium in order to guard the free-moral choice of man.

In influencing men and women

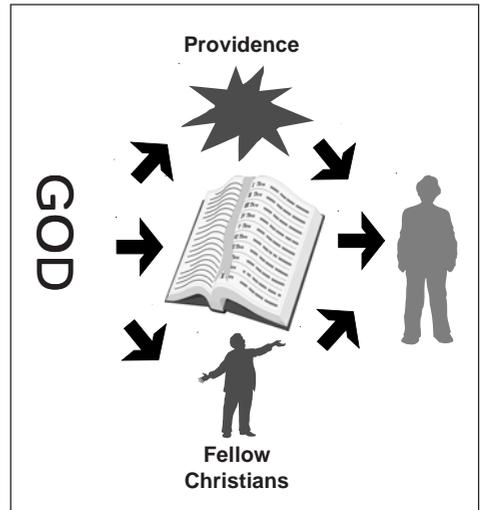
to comply with the will of God, the Spirit works through the medium of the word of revelation in order to instruct us to follow after His directions. All men, therefore, must free-morally respond to and follow the instructions of God that He gives through His word.

Though God may work through His inspired word to direct man to do that which is necessary for salvation and spiritual growth, we would not say that this is the only manner by which He intends to grow our faith. God does not work exclusively through His word in order to influence the Christian. He works in people around us who have obeyed His will, and He works through the instructions of His word. The following are areas whereby God seeks to influence us in our lives on earth as His children:

### A. God providentially influences our lives.

God does not work on man through “words only.” If He did, then the influence of the Spirit in the affairs of man would be greatly limited. **God the Spirit, therefore, works providentially in the affairs of man.**

By working in the affairs that surround the Christian, the Christian is affected. This is not God working through word of revelation. This is



God working in an indirect manner in order to work all things together for our good (Rm 8:28). It is God the Spirit working **on the world around the Christian in order to indirectly** influence the moral behavior of both the sinner and saint.

We must keep in mind, however, that this is not a direct work of the Spirit on the moral behavior of any individual. It is the work of God the Spirit in the affairs of this world in order to provide one with an opportunity to respond to the events in his or her life. God’s work through providence is indirect through the means or medium of circumstances surrounding the individual.

### B. God the Spirit works through the lives of others.

God the Spirit also works

through the lives of others. **The lives of individual Christians are affected through the lives of other Christians.** The biblical teaching of Christian fellowship was given for the purpose that God work on the hearts of individuals through the obedience of fellow Christians. When one remains in fellowship with fellow Christians, his or her life is affected, and thus changed.

As evil companions corrupt good behavior, so good Christian companions affect one in a positive manner. This is the indirect work of the Spirit on the heart of the individual. Through the individual response of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to the word of God, all the saints as a whole are influenced. This is what Paul meant when he stated, ***“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”*** (1 Co 11:1). This is what he meant in reference to the example of the Thessalonian disciples when he wrote of them,

*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word [of the gospel] in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe* (1 Th 1:6,7).

We must give credit for this work to the Holy Spirit, for it is the inspired

message of the gospel that directed the lives of Paul and the Thessalonians to influence others for Jesus.

**The believer can influence the unbeliever through Christian conduct.** This is what Peter meant in 1 Peter 3:1 when he commanded Christian wives to live the gospel before their unbelieving husbands. Peter exhorted Christian wives to live godly before their unbelieving husbands in order that the unbelieving husband *“without a word [of the gospel], may be won by the **conduct of their wives.**”*

This is an indirect influence of the Spirit on the heart of the unbeliever. Through the behavior of Christians, God works in the lives of unbelievers. This concept was also set forth by Jesus when He said of believers, *“You are the salt of the earth”* (Mt 5:13). God intends to affect and influence the world by the behavior of Christians who respond to the gospel. In this way the Spirit works to stimulate a response from those who are searching for a better life. This is what Jesus meant when He said, *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 5:16).

When a sinner is affected by those who are living in gratitude of the gospel, then those who live the gospel must *“be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks”* a reason

for the hope that is in him (1 Pt 3:15). The Christian's life must be conducted in a manner by which one gives a testimony to others that he or she has responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **C. God influences man through word of revelation.**

God has always influenced His people through words of instruction. Through words, He sought to lead and guide Israel out of idolatry by revealing to them what they should do in order to be obedient to the law of His covenant with the nation. Through words of instruction, He sought to guard them from apostasy. Through words, He communicated to the Jews in the first century to accept the gospel of Jesus (Mt 4:23).

**1. Through words, God appealed to mankind.** During the days of Noah's preaching, God sought to restore mankind to righteousness. His appeal was through the words of Noah's preaching. Through Noah, "*a preacher of righteousness*" (2 Pt 2:5), Christ "*went and preached*" to those of Noah's day (1 Pt 3:19,20; see Gn 6). Through Noah's inspired words, the Spirit worked to turn the hearts of men to obedience of God's will.

**2. Through words, God appealed to Israel.** God's appeal to re-

bellious Israel can be summed up in what Nehemiah wrote in Nehemiah 9. God gave His "*good Spirit to instruct them*" (Ne 9:20). Nehemiah said of their rebellion, "*Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself*" (Ne 9:26). In other words, the Spirit testified and appealed to them through the inspired words of the prophets. Nevertheless, Israel did not harken to the words of the prophets.

**3. Through words, God appealed to the Jews of the first century.** Peter appealed to the Jews on Pentecost through words of inspired preaching. After Peter preached on Pentecost, Luke recorded, "*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart ...*" (At 2:37). "*And with many other words he testified and exhorted them ...*" (At 2:40). "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized ...*" (At 2:41).

**4. Through words, God worked to continually build up the early disciples.** When Paul last met with the Ephesian elders, he commended them to the instruction of the word of God. He said, "*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).

James also exhorted Christians through words of instruction. He exhorted that his readers **receive** the word of God. He wrote, “*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*” (Js 1:21; see At 13:26).

To receive the word of the gospel is to accept it into one’s heart. Receiving the gospel means submitting to a life-style of gospel living. Paul commended the Ephesian elders to the word of God. James said that it must be received into one’s life in the sense that Christians must respond to the gospel by living that which was preached to them. It was this gospel in which the Corinthians were to stand (1 Co 15:1,2).

Faith in Jesus is produced by hearing, “*and hearing by the word of God*” (Rm 10:17). This is God’s system of producing faith in the individual. Faith is not produced miraculously through the direct work of the Spirit. It is produced by the individual’s hearing (study) the word of God. Faith in the heart of the sinner and saint alike is produced by the inspired word that communicates the gospel. There can be no faith in the true and living God if one does not know God through His revelation of the gospel.

The Spirit did not establish the inspired message of the gospel through inspired words, and then circumvent this inspired message of the gospel in order to directly sanctify the saint. It is the work of the Spirit to communicate the message of the gospel of grace through inspired words. Through the medium of the influence of these inspired words, He touches the heart of the sinner.

It is also the work of the Spirit to sanctify the heart of the saint. However, He does not work parallel to His word of revelation by directly generating in the hearts of men that which is required by God in order to be saved. Since the Spirit has placed so much emphasis on the preaching and teaching of the recorded message of the gospel, then we would conclude that He works through the inspired record of the gospel in order to build faith in the hearts of men.

Because the Holy Spirit places so much emphasis on the work of the preached and taught message of the gospel, does not mean that the Spirit and the word are the same. We must be clear on



this point. When we speak of the gospel, we speak concerning the incarnation, atoning sacrifice on the cross, resurrection, ascension, coronation, and consummation of all things by King Jesus. **It is the inspired word of the Holy Spirit that communicates to us information about these historical gospel events.** The gospel that is communicated to us by the inspired word of God is not the same as the Holy Spirit (See 1 Co 15:1-4). The gospel, therefore, is not the Holy Spirit. **The events of the gospel are reported to us through the Spirit-inspired words of the New Testament.**

**Since the Spirit inspired the message of the gospel to be written, then He is given credit for the communication of the gospel. But we must remember that it is the gospel that motivates the obedience of all believers.**

The Spirit is given credit for inspiration, but Jesus is given credit for the response to that which the Spirit has communicated through a written report. For example, in Hebrews 3:7 the Hebrew writer stated, “... *the Holy Spirit says ....*” The Hebrew writer then quoted Psalm 95:7-11 that was actually the written words of David. Since David was inspired by the Spirit to write the words, then the Spirit is the one who deserves credit for Psalm 95:7-11.

As another example, Paul exhorted the Ephesians to keep “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ep 4:3). He then stated that there was “*one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God*” (Ep 4:4-6). The Spirit is the foundation for unity because it was through the inspiration of the Spirit that the Ephesians were taught that there was one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism and God. The unity of the Spirit is maintained by continuing to believe in the word by which the Spirit has communicated the oneness of the body. The Spirit, therefore, deserves credit for unity because He is the one who worked to reveal the fundamental beliefs upon which unity is founded.

When the Spirit is given credit for the effect of what is produced through the preaching and teaching of His inspired word, this does not mean that the Spirit and the word are the same. The belief that the Spirit and word are the same is an erroneous conclusion and one that is based on a misunderstanding of how God, through inspiration, seeks to reveal the gospel to the alien sinner and change the heart of the saint. The instrument by which the Spirit seeks to accomplish His purposes is not literally Himself. However, since the instrument of conversion and spiritual

growth originated from God the Holy Spirit, then He deserves the credit. Since the word of God is the result of the inspired work of the Spirit, then it is the Spirit who must be given credit for reporting the gospel of the Son of God that changes lives. The power is in the gospel, but the communication of the gospel is revealed to us through the Spirit-inspired word of God.

Paul and all inspired writers received the gospel through revelation. They received the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and by inspiration preached this message. This mystery was communicated to the early disciples, first verbally, and then through inspired letters. Paul wrote, "... *how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words)*" (Ep 3:3). He also wrote, "*These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*" (1 Co 2:13). These were the words of inspiration that Christians should allow to dwell in them (Cl 3:16). By these words we are to be comforted. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "*Therefore comfort one another with these words*" (1 Th 4:18). This is the "***implanted word*** [of the gospel] *which is able to save your souls*" (Js 1:21); the incorruptible word by which we are begotten (1 Pt 1:23). Through these words

the Spirit instructs, reproves, corrects, comforts and teaches (2 Tm 3:16). These words are "*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow ...*" (Hb 4:12).

Since God intended that the influence of His word be so powerful on the soul of man, then we logically conclude that He would not need to directly influence the moral behavior of man through a subjective work of the Spirit. **Any teaching that says that the Spirit must directly, and thus miraculously, influence the heart of man, minimizes the effectiveness of the word of God that communicates the gospel to us. And more important, if there must be a direct influence of the Holy Spirit in order that we respond to the inspired report of the gospel, then the power of the gospel is minimized.**

If the Spirit does directly move the heart of man, then we would question the extent to which He does this work. We would also question the power of the gospel to motivate individuals to change in response to the incarnational offering of the Son of God.

Some have completely supplanted the work of the Spirit on the heart of man through the gospel. They have done so by teaching that the Spirit directly takes the place of the

impact of the gospel on our hearts. In fact, some have rejected the inspired report of the gospel by thinking that they have experientially been saved by the Spirit, regardless of the power of the gospel. These experientially saved individuals affirm that the Spirit teaches them directly, and thus, they have no need to study the Spirit's inspired record of the gospel. The inspired report of the gospel is marginalized by their claimed experiential encounters with the Holy Spirit.

When men become ignorant of what God intended to do through the Spirit-inspired testimony of the gospel, they will invent for themselves all sorts of influences that they believe God promised. When such people cease to be students of the word of God, they will seek any shortcut to spiritual growth.

If one believes that the Spirit directly influences the heart of man apart from the Scriptures, **then there is always a question as to how much influence the Spirit has to change one's moral behavior.**

The one who maintains the belief that it is the Spirit of God working through the inspired report of the gospel is often accused of maintaining a "Spiritless" faith. But such is an erroneous accusation in view of the fact that much of the accusation is based on a misunderstanding of the

subject under discussion. What is under discussion is the moral behavior of man and how God affects this behavior. What is primarily under discussion is the power of the gospel to transform lives. And this power is understood only through the Spirit's inspired record of the gospel. Therefore, we must make a decision. Is one's moral behavior free-morally changed by one's response to the recorded gospel, or is one subjectively changed directly by the Holy Spirit?

There is no question concerning the fact that the Spirit works through the medium of the Spirit-inspired Scriptures in the Christian's life in order to change the moral behavior of the Christian. By maintaining this position, we can always give God credit for any change in behavior simply because one has free-morally changed his life in response to the gospel. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Colossians: "*If you then were raised with Christ [in obedience to the gospel], seek those things that are above*" (Cl 3:1). He then explained what the Colossian disciples must do in their response to the gospel (See Cl 3:5-17). Through these works of inspired instruction, the Spirit sought to change the behavior of the Colossians, as well as ours today.

Consider this point from another perspective. If the word (message) of

the gospel is meant to be so powerful on the moral behavior of man, then why would there need to be a direct influence of the Spirit? **If the word of the gospel is as powerful as the Spirit claims it to be, then there is no need for the Spirit to circumvent His own report of the gospel in order to activate the influence of the gospel in either the life of the sinner or saint.**

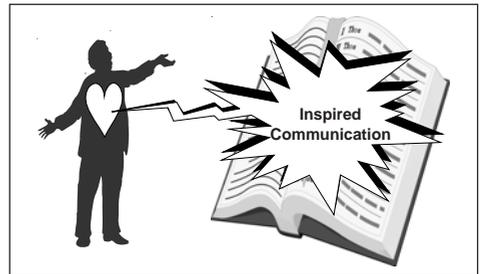
#### **D. God guides man through words of instruction.**

When God has dealt with man in the past to change or direct his moral behavior, it was always through inspired words of instruction.

**1. *The Spirit instructs through inspired words.*** In the Old Testament, God always instructed and guided the moral behavior of His children by inspired words of instruction. *“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets”* (Hb 1:1). God’s *“word was upon”* the tongue of David to direct Israel (2 Sm 23:2). God said to Jeremiah, *“Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them”* (Jr 5:14). God *“testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets ...”* (2 Kg 17:13; see vs 23).

God directed Israel by His prophets who spoke forth the words of instruction (2 Tm 3:16; 2 Pt 1:20,21). This allowed the Jews the opportunity to exercise their free-moral choice, and thus, determine their own destiny. When they were removed from the land of Palestine because of their disobedience, they could blame only themselves. Therefore, God’s justice stood unchallenged because He had forewarned them through the spoken words of the prophets. Their guilt was upon their own shoulders because the prophets spoke the word of God to them in order that they change their pattern of behavior (See Ez 18).

We would conclude that God works on the moral behavior of man today in the same manner as He worked on His people for thousands of years before the Pentecost of Acts 2. We do not have a greater advantage for moral development by a supposed direct influence of the Spirit on our hearts than the great heroes of faith as Abraham, David and the faithful of Israel.



If Abraham were able through personal obedient faith to respond to the word of God, and thus submit his moral behavior to God's will, then certainly one can do the same today if he fears and loves God. This is exactly what Jesus said: "*If you love Me you will keep My commandments*" (Jn 14:15). This is also exactly what the Holy Spirit said through John: "*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*" (1 Jn 5:3).

Abraham never arrogantly claimed he had accomplished moral strength by his own will. He did not boast of great faith when he went to the mountain in obedience to God's command to offer his son. Abraham did not gain his faith by meritorious works of law. His great faith was manifested in his response to the spoken word of God (Hb 11:8-10). He feared and loved God, and thus followed all of God's instructions. Nothing has changed since then.

Every person has the same opportunity today to obey as Abraham. Our advantage is that we have sixty-six books and letters of instruction that Abraham and the other Old Testament faithfuls did not have. They did not have the written instructions of such a great volume of documents, but we do. We would think, therefore, that our greater privilege of having the instructions of God on our laps, or laptops, we would be without

excuse to spiritually grow through Bible study (See Rm 1:20).

It is not that we have a greater ability today to grow spiritually than any obedient servant of God before Acts 2. The fact is that we have centuries of recorded history of how God has worked (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). On top of this, we also have the recorded revelation of the gospel of the Son of God in the New Testament. Since the faithful of God's people in the Old Testament remained faithful without the revelation of the gospel, then we would conclude that our faith is stronger today because of our knowledge of the revealed gospel. One might say that the faith of Abraham was greater in the sense that he obeyed without a knowledge of the gospel. Today we have a greater motivation to obey because we have that knowledge. Was this not in the mind of Peter when he wrote the following?

*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the*

*things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into* (1 Pt 1:10-12).

The point from the preceding statement of Peter is that God has always worked through revelation of Himself and His instructions in order to motivate moral growth. His revelation has thus been the foundation upon which we have built our faith. Through His revelation, God built faith in the hearts of man, but that faith was ignited in our hearts through the gospel. **Faith was not spontaneously generated in man by a direct work of God on the heart of man.**

**2. The Spirit spoke words in visions.** It is difficult to understand what actually took place in the event of a vision in the life of one who was blessed with the event. It was certainly a surreal happening wherein the one who experienced it could not determine whether the event was real or something of the mind only. When Paul was caught up to the third heaven, he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body (2 Co 12:1-4). The question is not that we understand what happened during a vision. The question centers around how God communicated in the vision, and how the information of the vision morally

affected the one who experienced it.

When the Spirit directed the prophets and apostles through visions, He did not communicate in a manner to control subjectively their moral behavior. He communicated through the senses of man, allowing God's servants to exercise their free-moral choice. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth, "*for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come*" (Jn 16:13). Acts 8:29 says, "*Then the Spirit said to Philip ....*" Paul was to be a witness for Jesus of what he had **seen and heard** (At 22:15). Paul saw a vision in Acts 16. But in that vision a man "*pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'*" (At 16:9; see 27:22-24). While in Corinth "*the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision*" (At 18:9). John was commanded to write in a book (Revelation) what he **saw** (Rv 1:11). It was the Spirit speaking through John to the seven churches of Asia (Rv 2:11).

In all this divine communication by vision, words were used as the means of communication. The prophets were allowed to see visions (See Ez 1:1). However, through words those visions were communicated to the people by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God not only spoke in the vision, the vision was communi-

cated to others through the inspired words of the prophet. God did not communicate the message of the visions through notions and nudges.

**3. The Spirit inspired words to be written.** 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 explains God's system of guidance by inspiration. Verses 10-12 teach that the mind of God was made known to man by the Spirit who knows God's mind. But the Spirit made known God's mind by a system of "*combining spiritual things with spiritual words*" (1 Co 2:13 - KJV). This brings to mind again what Jesus said in John 16:13, that the Spirit would **speak** what He heard. The Spirit used words to communicate to chosen men in order to reveal the mind of God to man (See

1 Co 14:37; Gl 1:11,12; 2 Pt 1:20,21).

The Holy Spirit still communicates to alien sinners and Christians today through inspired words. He does not minimize His inspired work through His word by directly influencing the heart of man in a subjective manner.

Those who believe that the Spirit still imparts knowledge of God's will directly to the believer often do not study their Bibles. But faith comes by hearing (studying) the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). If one wants to grow in faith, he must study the inspired word of the Spirit. If he or she does not, then one will be self-deceived, and thus led away from the truth of the gospel (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

## Chapter 4

### THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD

One of the principle teachings of the entire Bible is that the word of God is all-sufficient and able to bring one safely into heaven. God intended that we be able to follow His instructions in a manner that would allow us to have confidence before Him in judgment. This confidence is not in our ability to meritoriously obey the word of God perfectly, but in the power of the gospel of God's grace. Our response to the recorded message of the gospel, therefore, is necessary for our

salvation. If we respond to the gospel, John says, "*By this we know that we are of the truth [of the gospel], and shall assure our hearts before Him. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God*" (1 Jn 3:19-21). Our confidence in our relationship with God is based on our obedience to the gospel of God's grace.

It is not that one can legalistically obey the word of God in order to demand a salvation that is based on

meritorious obedience. Righteousness is not by works of law (Rm 4:1-5). We cannot place God in debt to save us (Rm 4:4). No one can ever obey law perfectly, and thus, no one can ever resort to perfect law-keeping in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). However, by trusting in God's grace, one can change his moral behavior in response to the grace of God. Paul wrote, "*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*" (Rm 4:5).

Nevertheless, Jesus promised, "***Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death***" (Jn 8:51). This is what we must believe and affirm. God has "*given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*" (2 Pt 1:3). By allowing **these things** (the full report of all the gospel) to inspire our moral behavior, we can have confidence that God is pleased with our faith.

It is not that one works himself into salvation through obedience to God's law. Paul stated clearly that through works of law no one will be justified before God (Gl 2:16). Paul's argument in Romans 4 is that our salvation is based on a faith response to the gospel. By responding to the gospel of God's grace that was mani-

festated through Jesus, one is obedient because of a heart of thanksgiving. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Ph 2:12).

The Christian is already saved. We have not worked meritoriously for our salvation. Therefore, since we are already saved through our obedience to the gospel, we must work out the salvation we have received through our obedience to the gospel. Obedience to the gospel brought us into Christ, wherein "***we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...***" (Ep 2:10).

We are not created in Christ Jesus **by** good works. We are created in Christ Jesus **for** good works. The reason for our existence as Christians is to carry out the work of Christ in our lives. Our good works, therefore, are an indication of our discipleship to Jesus. Good works reveal our appreciation for what we have in Christ.

Upon his arrival in Thessalonica, Paul first verbally communicated instructions to the Thessalonians. He later wrote,

*Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus **that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.***

***For this is the will of God, your sanctification*** (1 Th 4:1-3).

The Thessalonians could abound more and more by following the inspired instructions that they had received from Paul. This was their sanctification, or setting apart from the ways of the world. In other words, their lives were set apart from the world as a result of their free-moral obedience to the word of Paul's instructions. It was not that they were sanctified of sin by their obedient response to the gospel. It was because of their appreciation of the sanctification of the cross that they set themselves apart from the world in their obedience to the will of God. As stated before, this was the entire premise upon which Paul wrote the same message to the Colossians (See Cl 3).

In John 6:63 Jesus stated, ***"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."*** As the body without the spirit is dead (Js 2:26), so the Spirit's work in the life of the Christian is dead if one will not free-morally respond to the Spirit-inspired message of the gospel that comes to him through the written documents of the New Testament.

In John 6:63 **Jesus directly associated the life-giving work of the**

**Spirit with the word of the Spirit.** Therefore, it is through the inspired record of the gospel that the Spirit produces life. Whether spoken or written, the inspired message of the gospel of the early apostles and prophets will give life if obeyed.

It was the Spirit who guided the speaking of both the Old and New Testament prophets (2 Pt 1:21). The same Spirit guided the New Testament writers (2 Tm 3:16). God has used the inspired words of the Spirit in order to affect and change the moral behavior of man. Therefore, any credit for change in moral behavior in response to the gospel must be understood to have originated from God through the Scriptures. This is true simply because one changes his life in response to what he believes God tells him to do.

God intended that the spoken and written word of the gospel should have a great impact on the minds and hearts of men. We must not minimize this purpose in the Spirit's efforts to bring to us words of inspired instruction.

It has always been the work of God to transcend the environment of man through the instruction of words. In this way, free-moral individuals have the opportunity to respond to the record of the gospel, and thus live according to the will of God. In this way, each person will be held account-

able for his own response to the gospel. If one loses his soul in final judgment, he cannot blame God in any way. The following is a list of things that God seeks to accomplish through His word:

**THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT  
THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES**

1. Produce faith (Lk 1:3,4; 8:12; Jn 20:30,31; Rm 10:17).
2. Sanctify the soul (Jn 17:17; Ep 5:26; 2 Th 2:13).
3. Convert the soul (1 Co 4:15; Js 1:18; 1 Pt 1:23).
4. Save the soul (Ps 19:7; At 11:14; 1 Co 15:1,2; Js 1:21; 1 Pt 1:22).
5. Cleanse the soul (Jn 15:2; Ep 5:26).
6. Purify the soul (1 Pt 1:22).
7. Quicken the soul (Ps 119:50,93; Jn 6:63; Ep 2:1,5).
8. Enlighten the mind (Ps 19:8; 119:130).
9. Give understanding (Jb 32:8; Ps 119:104,130; Ep 3:4; 2 Tm 3:15).
10. Lead one's life (Ps 73:24; 119:105; Lk 1:77-79; Hb 10:15-18).
11. Comfort the heart (Rm 15:4; 1 Th 3:2; 4:18; see Rm 14:17).
12. Bear witness of Jesus for Christians (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:6-8,39; 15:26; Hb 10:15-18).
13. Produce spiritual growth (At 20:32; Cl 1:10,11; 1 Pt 2:1,2; 2 Pt 3:18).
14. Spiritually work in the Christian (Cl 3:16; 1 Th 2:13).
15. Produce spiritual fruit (Gl 5:22,23; see Cl 1:5-10 as a commentary on how the Spirit produces the fruit of Gl 5:22,23).
16. Strengthen the soul (At 20:32; Cl 1:10,11; 2 Tm 2:1,2; Rv 12:11; read Rm 10:17 in relation to Hb 11).
17. Control our lives (1 Tm 3:14,15).
18. Admonish (1 Co 4:14; 10:11).
19. Guard us from error (2 Tm 3:13-15).
20. Spiritually stir us up (2 Pt 1:12,13).
21. Exhort us (1 Pt 5:12).
22. Instruct our minds (Ne 9:20,26,30; 2 Tm 3:16,17).

The preceding works of the Spirit through inspired words manifest what the Spirit intended to accomplish through words of Scripture in order to mold man's behavior into that which is pleasing to God. We must not underestimate what God intended to do in His work among men through His spoken and written word. If we do, then we assume that the word of God plays a lesser role in the instruction of man than what God intended. Therefore, when studying the work of the Spirit, it is imperative that we clearly understand what the Bible teaches concerning the effect of the guiding work of the Spirit through the word of God. Regardless of our mixed conclusions concerning the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we must never minimize His ministry through His recorded instructions of Scriptures.

Through the Scriptures, God intended that the man of God be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tm 3:17). Therefore, the word of the Spirit is able to furnish man with everything that God requires of him to know in order to direct his life according to God's moral demands. In view of this fact, we must ask ourselves if the word of God can stand all-sufficient in what it claims to do for man if there is a direct operation of the Spirit upon the soul of man.

If the Spirit claims that He works on the moral behavior of man through inspired Scripture, then what else must He supply for man apart from the Scriptures? This question has always generated a great deal of discussion. Nevertheless, we must respond to the question in view of the preceding works that are listed in reference to the Spirit's work through the inspired word of God. If the Spirit works separate and apart from the word of God to accomplish what is listed above, then we must wonder how He accomplishes such, and in what manner He brings about that which He affirms the word of God accomplishes.

If the Spirit does work in areas where He said His word works, then we must allow the Spirit to define in the word of God how He so works. We do not have the option of believing that the Spirit works in a certain manner simply because we wish to believe that He does. If the Spirit affirms that He works through the medium of the word to produce the preceding listed results, then we must accept the fact that He does. However, if He affirms that He also works in the preceding manner that is direct, then we must accept what He says on the matter without fully understanding how He so works.

For example, the Spirit says that He comforts and strengthens through

the word (Rm 15:4), as well as through fellow Christians (1 Th 3:2). He uses the word of God to bring comfort to our hearts because we read of God's faithfulness. However, this would not say that the Spirit also comforts in other ways that are not directly associated with the word of God. Paul said to the Thessalonians, "*Therefore comfort one another with these words*" (1 Th 4:18). Through the words of the inspired writers, the Christian is comforted. However, in other ways the Spirit affirms that God comforts in ways that are explained in 2 Corinthians 1. Paul wrote,

*Blessed be the God ... who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God* (2 Co 1:3-7).

At the time Paul wrote this passage, neither he nor the Corinthians had written New Testaments to read and study for comfort. The comfort they received, therefore, came from another source or sources.

Though the first Christians did have some inspired writings for comfort, their comfort would have come through the words of inspired prophets and the gift of faith. However, we would not rule out the mystery of God in comforting Paul and others as they

were so comforted in 2 Corinthians 1. How the Spirit works to comfort directly is not explained in the Scriptures. What is explained is the fact that the word of God brings comfort, as well as the Spirit through means we do not understand.

There are indirect means by which God brings comfort to the Christian. God comforts the Christian by the close fellowship of other Christians. He strengthens by the companionship of those who give us encouragement. Paul seems to state in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 that there is a comfort that comes directly from God. He indicated this also when speaking of having peace of mind. He wrote, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds though Christ Jesus”* (Ph 4:7). This statement was also written in the absence of any written word of Scripture. We must understand that the first recipients of the New Testament letters had no New Testaments when the letters spoke concerning peace, comfort and strength.

We must understand, however, **that comforting and strengthening are not the changing of moral behavior.** One can be comforted or strengthened without being made more loving or forgiving or meek. We would not associate the comforting or strengthening of the individual in

times of tribulation as a change in moral behavior. One can be lost for not being a loving person. However, one would not be lost for lack of being comforted enough in a time of trial, or strong enough in persecution. One may fall away and blame God for not being comforted or strengthened in order to stand faithful in an hour of trial. However, he or she would not be lost because of a lack of comfort or strength. God’s strength and comfort do not guarantee salvation.

The apostate will never have just accusation against God. But we must remember that one can and will be judged for being an unloving or unforgiving person. For this reason, we must make a difference between the work of God in comforting and strengthening and those spiritual requirements that are necessary in our response to the gospel. In order to produce spiritual requirements, the Spirit works through the medium of the inspired message of the gospel.

The word of the Spirit is able to give guidance to those who seek the will of God in order to be presentable and acceptable to God. In this sense, God intended that the Scriptures furnish the man of God completely unto every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17) and spiritual requirement (2 Pt 1:3). The Scriptures are the Christian’s road map by which he must find the Father. They are the *“implanted word which*

is able to save your souls” (Js 1:21).

If the Holy Spirit operates directly on the heart of man to change his moral behavior, then He must work in a manner by which He protects the free-moral choice of a submissive heart. **Therefore, if the word of the Spirit is unable to do the things the Spirit claims it can do**

**effectively and efficiently, then the word is not all-sufficient.**

In other words, the Spirit cannot claim through the word that the Scriptures are all-sufficient, and at the same time, be “subsidizing” the word with extra power. Either the word is able to do what it so claims to be able to do, or it cannot.

## Chapter 5

### THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

In reference to the conversion of the alien sinner, it must be affirmed that the Spirit works through the preached and taught word of the gospel in order to bring the alien sinner to a knowledge of what he must do in order to be saved. If the Spirit operates directly in conversion in order to move the sinner to obedience, then we must ask, “What does He do?”

#### A. What the Spirit will not do:

The following are things that the Spirit **will not** do in the conversion of the alien sinner:

##### 1. *The Spirit will not violate free-moral choice in conversion.*

The Spirit will not operate directly on the moral behavior of man in order to violate man’s free-moral choice. If He did, then God’s justice would be

questioned in the final judgment by those who heard the word of the gospel, and yet, were not motivated enough by the Spirit to respond to the gospel.

If the Spirit did operate directly in the process of conversion, then this would make God a respecter of persons, for the gospel is always preached to many people who do not obey. If the Spirit supposedly operated directly, then we would always wonder why those who did not obey the gospel were not motivated enough by the Spirit to obey. Since many who hear, do not obey the gospel, then we must conclude that the Spirit does not work with respect of persons in order to motivate the alien sinner to obey the gospel.

2. *The Spirit will not deliver to us more revelation of the gospel than what has already been revealed.* It

is not that the Spirit is unable to deliver more revelation. The fact is that He has delivered everything to us that we should know about the gospel.

Peter wrote, “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pt 1:3; Jd 3). If we needed more revelation for salvation or spiritual guidance than what we now have, then the Bible is not all-sufficient. Because the Spirit affirms that the inspired word is all-sufficient, God affirms that He will not deliver more revelation (2 Tm 3:16,17).

The fact is that there is only one gospel (See Gl 1:6-9). This gospel has been revealed and recorded (Ep 3:3-5). Once one obeys the gospel through immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the written word of God is sufficient to supply the believer with all that is necessary in order to be instructed in what God would have one do in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18).

**3. *The Spirit will not lead one contrary to the word of truth or the gospel.*** The Holy Spirit cannot, and will not, directly lead an individual contrary to the teachings He has given to man in the Bible. If He did lead us today contrary to what He has already revealed, then He would be contradicting Himself. If the Spirit directly leads in directing our work, then He

contradicts Himself for He claimed that the Scriptures are able to furnish us thoroughly unto every good work (2 Tm 3:17).

**4. *The Spirit will not help us understand the Bible.*** The Bible was written in order that we understand the mystery of the gospel (Ep 3:1-6; 5:17; Rv 1:3). The Spirit does not need to help one understand that which was written in order to help us understand the mystery of gospel. The Spirit does not supplement His word in our understanding of the gospel.

It is a subtle attack against the Spirit’s ability to inspire the writing of the Scriptures in an understandable manner if we say that He is needed to help us understand His inspired writings. The doctrine of inspired interpretation is nowhere taught in the Scriptures. James stated that we should pray for wisdom (Js 1:5). However, wisdom is needed to apply knowledge that we learn from our studies of the Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit affirms that the inspired word of the gospel that has already been revealed and recorded is all-sufficient in order to accomplish the purpose for which it was revealed. Therefore, God motivates the free-moral choice of the alien sinner through the all-sufficient revelation of the message of the gospel. If the report of this gospel message is all-suffi-

cient—and it is—then it is able to bring one to Christ. If this report is all-sufficient—and it is—then it is able to lead into eternal life.

## **B. Work of the Spirit through the gospel in conversion:**

In order for one to come into a covenant relationship with God, he must obey the gospel. When Paul went to the city of Corinth, he communicated the gospel to the Corinthians through the medium of words (1 Co 15:1,2). The Corinthians had not personally experienced the event of the gospel in Jerusalem. Neither had they witnessed the crucifixion, nor the resurrection. They only knew of the gospel through the communication of Paul's words. Today, all men are informed of the gospel that happened about two thousand years ago through the written record of the gospel.

In order to be saved, all who would be saved must come into a covenant relationship with God according to the conditions that are revealed in His written word. All who would be saved must submit to obedience of the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6). In order for one to know what to do in order to submit, and subsequently come into a covenant relationship with God, he must be informed about the gospel. This instruction concerning the gospel goes to all people today only

through the word of God, that is, the gospel is revealed only in the Bible.

God has always intended that people free-morally respond to the written or spoken word of the gospel that must be obeyed in order for one to come into a covenant relationship with God.

**1. *It was prophesied that conversion would be in response to the preached and written record of the gospel.*** Under the Sinai law, the Jews were physically born into a covenant relationship with God (Jr 31:31-34). God had originally made a covenant with Abraham (Gn 17:1-14). All males who were born of his seed, and circumcised the eighth day, were brought into this covenant relationship (Gn 17:9-11).

When these newborn babes were circumcised, they knew nothing of the covenant relationship that God had established with Israel. They knew nothing of God. Nevertheless, because they were born of the seed of Abraham and were circumcised, they were brought into a covenant relationship with God who had established a covenant with the nation of Israel. As they grew up, they were taught to know God.

However, Jeremiah prophesied that the Sinai system of establishing a covenant relationship with God would change.

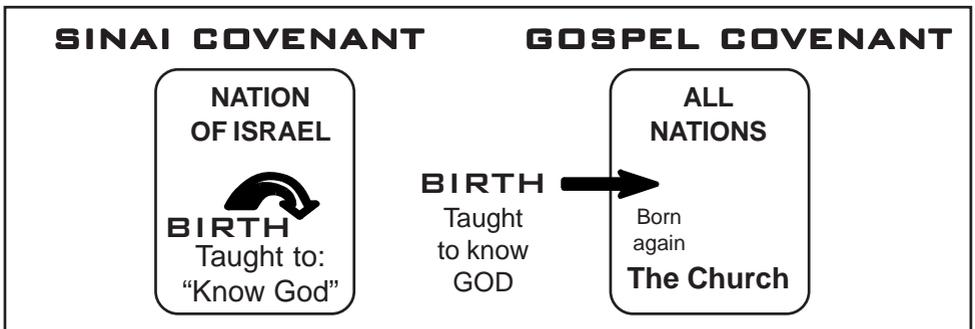
*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ... not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers .... But this is the covenant that I will make .... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts .... No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me ... (Jr 31:31-34).*

In Hebrews 8:8-12 this prophecy was applied to the gospel covenant that Jesus has now established with Christians. Under the old covenant, the newly circumcised Hebrew child had to be taught the law of God while he grew up. During this time of teaching he was in a covenant relationship with God. However, under the new covenant, **one is taught the law of God (the gospel) before he or she comes into covenant relationship with God.** One is first taught the gospel, and then, he or she obeys the gospel by immersion in order to come

into a covenant relationship with God. All who come into a covenant relationship under the new covenant, therefore, already know God because they have already been taught the gospel.

Jesus said, *“Come to Me ... and learn from Me ...”* (Mt 11:28,29). *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”* (Jn 6:44). One is drawn to Jesus through the gospel. Jesus stated, *“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me”* (Jn 6:45).

If anyone desires to come to Jesus today, he or she must be drawn by words of instruction concerning the gospel. This is what Jeremiah prophesied. When one is brought into a covenant relationship with God today, therefore, he has already been taught to know God. And one knows God through Jesus (Jn 14:9). God’s law is already in his heart when he obeys the gospel because he has already learned



from the Scriptures about the incarnational Son of God and what is required of him in order to establish a covenant relationship with God.

Faith in Jesus is produced in one's heart by understanding the atoning sacrifice that the Son of God made at the cross (See Jn 20:30,31; Rm 10:17). When one hears and learns the gospel of Jesus, he is drawn to Jesus. When one asks what to do to be saved, the inspired word instructs, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (At 2:38).

There is nothing complicated about this, and nothing mysterious. This was God's prophesied system of bringing all men into a saving covenant relationship with Him. This is what happened in the first century when the gospel was first proclaimed. In this same manner God works today through the message of the gospel in order to bring people into Christ.

**2. *The New Testament teaches that conversion takes place through words of education concerning the gospel.*** The New Testament is a record of how men and women heard, learned and obeyed the gospel of Jesus. In all these cases of conversion, there is no mention of any direct work of the Spirit to generate within the hearts of those who heard an urge to respond to the gospel.

**a. Words communicated the saving gospel message.** Jesus commanded His disciples to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16:15; see Mt 28:18-20). This gospel was the "*power of God to salvation*" (Rm 1:16). Through the early evangelists, this message was preached (Ep 3:8). Men and women heard the gospel message through words and were born again by obedience to the preached gospel (Js 1:21). **Therefore, it was through the preaching of the gospel, not some direct operation of the Spirit, that men and women were brought into a covenant relationship with God.**

**b. The word of God is the seed that produces fruit.** Jesus taught that the "*seed is the word of God*" (Lk 8:11). It is the nature of a seed to produce fruit. In the parable of the Sower, it was this seed that produced fruit when those who were represented by the good soil heard and obeyed (Mt 13:1-9,18-23). This corresponds perfectly with what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23,25:

*Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. ... this is the word by which the gospel was preached to you.*

Christians have been brought forth

**“by the word of truth”** (Js 1:18). The truth of the gospel is the seed of the kingdom that produces fruit in the hearts of those who obey God.

The seed of the word of God must be sown. When heard by sincere hearts, it brings forth fruit. A direct operation of the Spirit would negate the nature of the self-producing seed of the kingdom. If the seed of the word cannot produce within itself, then it is a sterile seed. Why would the Spirit refer to the word as the seed of the kingdom if He must also germinate it in the heart of the alien sinner or the Christian? If the seed needed an outside force to make it germinate, then the use of the word “seed” as a metaphor has lost its meaning. The very fact that a seed is self-contained, and thus does not need an outside force to germinate, makes it the perfect metaphor to illustrate the self-contained work of the word of God to produce the same fruit from which the seed originated.

Paul brought forth fruit from the

Corinthians *“through the gospel”* (1 Co 4:15). This fruit was produced by the preached seed. He planted the seed through the preaching of the gospel (1 Co 15:1,2). Through continued teaching, Apollos watered what Paul had planted (See Rm 1:13-16). **God is given credit for bringing forth the increase because the seed originated from God** (1 Co 3:6). Paul produced fruit in Corinth because *“it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1 Co 1:21).

The Romans had also *“obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine”* which was preached to them (Rm 6:17). The seed is planted by preaching. It brings forth fruit through the obedience of sincere hearts. This is God’s system of salvation for the lost. It is the nature of the seed to produce the fruit. Once obeyed, sincere believers then grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18).

## Chapter 6

### EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION

The example of New Testament conversions teaches conversion in response to words that communicate the gospel. In every New Testament example of conversion, individuals were

led to Jesus through the preaching or teaching of the gospel. Men were not brought to Jesus through some direct work of the Spirit. They were drawn to Christ by hearing the instruction of

the preached gospel with words of communication (see Jn 6:45).

### A. Acts 2:

On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, Peter “*standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said ...*” (At 2:14). After some discourse, Acts 2:37 reads, “*Now when they heard this ....*” “*And with many other words he testified and exhorted them ...*” (At 2:40). “*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized ...*” (At 2:41). Those who heard and believed were baptized and added to the saved (At 2:41,47). They were saved by hearing and obeying the preached gospel that came to them through words of communication.

### B. Acts 4:

Luke recorded that “*many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand*” (At 4:4). Men and women here responded to the preaching of the gospel that was communicated to them through words.

### C. Acts 8:

In Samaria they “*believed Philip as he preached* [with words] *the things concerning the kingdom of God*

*and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized*” (At 8:12). As in this case and others, no mention is made of a direct work of the Spirit generating a response in the hearts of those who heard the preached word of the gospel.

### D. Acts 8:

As the Ethiopian eunuch journeyed from Jerusalem, he was **reading the words** of Isaiah 53 (At 8:32,33). He did not understand what he was reading, so “*Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him*” (At 8:35). This led to his conversion.

There was no direct operation of the Spirit in this case. The eunuch needed a teacher. The Spirit thus sent Philip the teacher to the eunuch (At 8:29). The Spirit could have directly revealed to the eunuch what to do to be saved. He could have inspired the eunuch to understand what he was reading from the book of Isaiah. But the Spirit does not work in this manner. Only through the preaching and teaching of the gospel through words will men be able to hear and obey the gospel.

### E. Acts 9:

Paul was converted through spoken words. Jesus appeared to him in

a vision and told him to go to the city of Damascus, “*and you will be **bold** what you must do*” (At 9:6). It was the preacher Ananias whom Jesus sent to Paul to tell him what to do to be saved. Ananias said to Paul, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

Paul was not told to pray for the Holy Spirit to save him. He was instructed to be baptized by a preacher of God’s word. If it were the work of the Spirit to come and directly save him, or tell him what to do to be saved, then we would expect Ananias to tell him to do just this. But he did not. Ananias did not because it is not the work of the Spirit to directly save individuals.

#### F. Acts 10,11:

Cornelius and his household were converted through the preaching of the word of the gospel. Cornelius was charged by the angel to get Peter, the preacher (At 10:5,6), “*who will tell you **words** by which you and all your household will be saved*” (At 11:14).

Peter had previously experienced a vision wherein the Lord instructed him concerning the preaching of the gospel to all men. God wanted Cornelius to hear words whereby he

might be saved through obedience to the gospel (At 10:22). The Lord could have sent the Spirit directly to Cornelius to deliver these words. But this was not the way the Spirit worked in conversion. God sent the preacher who used words of communication in order to preach the gospel. Peter thus went to Cornelius and instructed him in the way of the Lord (At 10:33).

#### G. Acts 16:

Lydia **heard** the preaching of Paul and his company (At 16:14). She then gave “*heed to the things **spoken** by Paul*” (At 16:14). She was not nudged by the Spirit. She was not directly influenced by the Spirit. She free-morally chose to obey the message of words that were spoken by Paul.

#### H. Acts 16:

Paul and Silas “*spoke the word of the Lord*” to the Philippian jailor (At 16:32). The jailor subsequently obeyed these words the same hour of the night by immersion in water for remission of sins (At 16:33).

#### I. Acts 17:

The Bereans “*were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received the word** with*

all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily” (At 17:11). The Bereans received the word because Paul was proclaiming the word of the gospel (At 17:13). They did not receive it because the Spirit was working directly on their minds in order to reveal the word of that gospel directly to them. They were simply receiving the spoken message of the gospel because they had open and honest hearts as those on Pentecost in Acts 2 (At 2:41).

## J. Acts 19:

There were approximately twelve Ephesians to whom Paul preached the gospel in Acts 19. Verse 5 states, “When they *heard this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” They obeyed what they heard, not something they felt. They thus knew what to obey because the message was communicated to them through words.

In all of the preceding cases of conversion that are recorded in the New Testament, not one mention is made of the Holy Spirit operating “in conjunction with” the spoken word to bring about a response to the message of the gospel. In every example, it was always the case that men exercised their free-moral choice in order to respond to the message of the gos-

pel. The Spirit did not compel anyone to believe what he heard. These conversions were as simple as the Corinthians, who “*hearing, believed and were baptized*” (At 18:8).

The Spirit worked with the preached word in the first century in a “confirming manner” (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4). His miraculous work to confirm the spoken word was for the purpose of drawing men’s attention to what was being said. **The fact that the Spirit worked for the purpose of miraculously confirming the word is proof that His work was not to directly influence the hearts of the hearers.** In other words, there would have been no reason for the miraculous confirmation of the message of the gospel if the Spirit could simply have moved men’s hearts to respond to the message.

Neither was it the Spirit’s work to miraculously move men’s hearts to respond to the preached gospel. Because it was not the Spirit’s work to directly move men’s hearts to respond to the preached message, it was necessary that the Spirit miraculously confirm the message with miracles. The power was in the message of the gospel, not in a supposed miraculous generation of the hearts of men to respond to the gospel (Rm 1:16).

Nevertheless, many in the first century rejected the gospel message of those early Christians, regardless

of the miraculous confirmation. If we contend that the Holy Spirit chose to operate directly on a few chosen individuals in order that they respond to the gospel, then we have placed God in the position of being a respecter of persons.

We must continually remind ourselves that any teaching that says the Spirit operates directly on the heart of man attacks the justice of God. How could God stand just in the final judgment by condemning to hell someone like Bar-jesus whom the Spirit supposedly decided not to move to obey Paul's spoken message of the gospel (At 13:6ff)? If the Spirit does operate directly, then He failed in Acts 26:28 in not moving Agrippa to respond to the gospel. After Paul had preached the gospel to Agrippa, the King replied, "*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.*"

Did the Spirit fail in the case of Agrippa? Why did He not "activate" the word enough in the life of this king if He is supposed to operate directly on the heart of the alien sinner? Agrippa's lack of response teaches that the Spirit does not operate directly on the hearts of those who hear the gospel. He does not generate a response in their hearts to obey the preached the gospel. Because this is true, God the Spirit will not be held accountable in final judgment for the condemnation of those who have

heard the gospel, and yet, did not respond by obeying the gospel.

The Spirit's instrument of power in the hearts of men is invested in the inspired words of the Spirit. Great power is ascribed to the Scriptures that communicate the gospel to us. God said to Jeremiah, "*Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them*" (Jr 5:14). Jeremiah accepted the mission to preach the word of God to the nation of Israel. When he tried not to speak this word, God's "*word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones*" (Jr 20:9).

The Bible, with the New Testament, is more powerful because it contains the full message of the gospel. Because God fulfilled all His promises in reference to the revelation of the gospel of His Son, His word ...

*... 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* (Hb 4:12).

This is the word of the gospel "*which effectively works in you who believe*" (1 Th 2:13). It is the word that is able "*to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are*

*sanctified*” (At 20:32).

Through the medium of the preached gospel, the Spirit works on the heart of the sinner to bring him to obedience of the gospel. The Spirit does not work to activate the heart of the sinner to respond, for the power of conversion is the gospel. Through the power of inspired revelation of the gospel, one can save his soul by obedience to this gospel. The saint can lay up the message of the gospel in his heart in order that he not sin against God. He can continue to stand in the gospel (1 Co 15:1,2). The means by which the sinner is brought to obedience is the preached gospel. The instrument of the Spirit to keep the saints separated from the world is the gospel of the cross (Cl 3).

In order to bring an individual into eternal dwelling in heaven, God first calls people out of the masses of humanity who will respond to the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Once one obeys the gospel, and comes into the fellowship of the saints, he is built up by the word of the gospel. He is separated from the world by continual obedience to God’s word. God also providentially works in the life of the saint in order to work all things together for good.

From the preceding points it has been proved that obedience to the gospel, and continued leading by the Scriptures, we are able to produce a

character that manifests the aroma of Christ. The gospel can produce a contrite spirit in the heart of the alien sinner. In order for the preached gospel to effectively work, the alien sinner must totally submit to the call of God through the gospel. This is why there are so many pleas in the Scriptures that men humble themselves in the sight of God (See 1 Pt 5:5-7).

When the converted sinner comes into a covenant relationship with the Father, his relationship with the Father changes. In this changed relationship, the contrite heart can still be affected by the word of God in a manner to produce a character worthy of salvation. The gospel is the power to motivate convicted hearts to continue to follow the road map of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are all-sufficient to produce a faithful character if one submits to the continued power of the gospel. Because of the saints’ special relationship with the Father in a covenant relationship, the Father works in an often mysterious manner to affect and direct the life of the Christian. His ways are past finding out. His ways are mysterious simply because He does not and cannot explain them in a way that can be understood completely by those who are confined to this earthly environment. Therefore, the fact that His workings are beyond our experiential world,

means they are mysterious only to us.

In this realm of God's work, we cannot be dogmatic. One might be zealous in believing that God works in ways we cannot understand. However, he would be presumptuous to affirm specifics that God does. We give room for discussion concerning the mysterious work of God in those areas that are beyond our comprehension.

Nevertheless, in reference to the

explanations in His word, we must maintain faith in the specifics of how God says He works. We are not so presumptuous as to empirically affirm the dew on the fleece at a specific time and manner. We walk by faith, not by sight, lest we walk by our own religious inventions. True spiritual growth always results in the lives of those who seek to walk according to the power of the gospel.

## Chapter 7

### THE LANGUAGE OF INDWELLING

The New Testament clearly teaches that there is a special relationship between the Christian and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is defined as an "indwelling" of the Spirit. It is an indwelling relationship that one does not have with the Spirit before he becomes a child of God through obedience to the gospel.

Though the Spirit works on the heart of the alien sinner before baptism through the spoken or written word of the gospel, He indwells the Christian in a special relationship after baptism. God maintains this special relationship with His people until King Jesus comes again. It is then that our relationship with God will be truly personal.

When discussing the indwelling

of God in the Christian while in this world, we must be careful to not literalize metaphors of human location in reference to God, and thus, localize God. The very nature of words as "in," "here," "there," and "indwell" in our human vocabulary carry with them the earthly meaning of **location**. We are either "here" or "there." But God is "here" and "there" at the same time. Therefore, when earthly words are used in the Bible to refer to the presence of God, they must first be understood metaphorically.

We cannot place God in a particular location. When we use words as "in," "with," "enter," "upon," etc. in reference to God, we often force an earthly and human characteristic or action upon God. However, when

such words are used to refer to God, we must first assume that there is some metaphorical meaning that is implied. God is beyond the source of our metaphors, that is, He is beyond the earthly definition of our words.

We do not serve a God who is confined to a location as we are so confined. We would not locate God in the physical structure of some temple. We would not, as apostate Israel, place Him on top of a mountain or confine Him to a literal definition of our own bodies alone. Literalizing beautiful metaphors in reference to God leads us to misunderstand the wonderful relationship God has with His creation. **This relationship is explained with words that are of this world, but indicate something that is far beyond this world.** Therefore, we must not confine God to this world with a literal definition of our words that are used in the Bible to define either His existence or actions.

It is true that the Holy Spirit used “words of location” to explain the work, being, and presence of God. This is particularly true in His relationship with His people. However, we must understand that the Holy Spirit was limited to the use of **our** dictionary. If He would have used a “heavenly dictionary,” we would not have been able to understand the Bible. “Heavenly words” have no

earthly definitions. One must understand, therefore, that **earthly words fall far short of explaining heavenly concepts.**

For the above reason, the Holy Spirit in inspiration used metaphors in order to explain those things with which we have had no experience. Simple words as “in” and “indwell” are often used in a metaphorical sense to explain something that is greater than our human experience. Therefore, something greater than the earthly definitions of the words is being conveyed by the Spirit when these words are used metaphorically in reference to the Holy Spirit.

Biblical interpreters have often made an unfortunate error here. In failing to understand the inability of human words to define that which is beyond the human experience, they have humanized numerous concepts concerning God. This unfortunate practice has led to a great deal of confusion in our attempts to understand the nature and indwelling of God. By forcing God to conform to the definitions of our earthly words, we have understood God according to our own imagination and after our own desires.

However, we are not alone in failing to recognize the fact that God is beyond human description. In other words, He is far beyond the definition of the words of our dictionary. Because many of the Jews failed to

understand this, they also had difficulty understanding metaphors that were used in reference to their relationship with God. This was especially true concerning their tendency to localize God to Palestine, and specifically to a temple once it was constructed. Their localization of God was clearly brought out in their theology of the “God in a temple.”

By the time of the kingship of Solomon, Solomon knew that the people would seek to locate God in the temple that was newly constructed. When he completed the temple in Jerusalem, therefore, and at the inauguration of the structure, he reminded the Jews,

*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! (1 Kg 8:27; see 2 Ch 2:6).*

Solomon was right. Nevertheless, the Jews’ earthly understandings persisted throughout their history. When Israel was deep into their apostasy of turning from the God of heaven, God rebuked them by saying, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. **Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?**” (Is 66:1).

Israel persisted in localizing God

in Jerusalem, and in particular, in the temple. Unfortunately, they missed the metaphors, and thus, missed a true understanding of the omnipresent Deity who created them. We often do the same today.

Since God is God, He does not dwell in a particular location, **for it is superfluous to affirm that He dwells here or there in His creation. He simply is!** And the fact that He is God means that He cannot be confined to a specific “location.” He cannot be located somewhere in His creation. He is located everywhere. The words “here” and “there” refer to the position that material objects or individuals have with one another. But this is not the case with God.

God was not “there” in the temple while we are “here” in our houses. God is both “here” and “there” at the same time. Therefore, we do not go to the temple in order to encounter God. He is both in our house and in the temple simultaneously. Such is the nature of His existence. **God Is!**

Stephen rebutted the Jews “localization theology” in Acts 7:48: “**The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands.**” Stephen then quoted Solomon’s statements to remind the Jews that God never intended to dwell in a temple as they desired (At 7:49,50). It is simply not possible for God to be omnipresent,

and at the same time, located. This is a logical contradiction.

Paul made the same argument to the Greek philosophers that Stephen made to the Jews, who also had the concept of placing God at a particular location. So Paul argued in Athens, “*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands*” (At 17:24).

In the mythological religion of the Greeks, the gods were conceived to be in different locations at different times. The Greeks had a humanized concept of deity. They created gods after their own imagination, and thus, when they thought of their gods they thought that the gods behaved as man. However, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teach such a concept concerning the true God of heaven.

Solomon, Stephen and Paul all maintained the same argument that was based on the statement that God made to Israel: “*Has My hand not made all these things?*” (At 7:50; see Ps 102:25; Is 66:2). In other words, God was saying that He could not dwell in something that is innate or material that He Himself had created. **How could that which is created, box in He who creates it?**

Our earthly understanding is that we build a house, and then, “dwell”

in that house. However, God created the timber, the nails and all the construction materials. How do we think we can confine God by that which He has created? Israel could not confine God to the four walls of a temple. Neither can we confine Him to any “holy” structure that we would build for Him.

In reference to the omnipresence of God, the Psalmist wrote that the whole earth is full of His glory (Ps 72:19; see Hk 2:14). We cannot escape the presence of God, “*for in Him we live and move and have our being*” (At 17:28). We have our being **in Him**. He does not have His being in us. His existence is not dependent on our existence, nor on our imagination.

The fact that God exists means that He is omnipresent. We are in His presence at all times. He is simultaneously here, there and everywhere. He cannot be localized on the far side of the planet of Mars, or in another galaxy. He cannot be localized in any part of His creation. We cannot escape His presence even if it were possible for us to travel at light speed beyond our galaxy.

The nature of Jesus’ incarnation argues the omnipresence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul wrote concerning Jesus,

*Who being in the form of God, did*

*not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men (Ph 2:6,7).*

John affirmed that “*the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:1,14). Before the incarnation, God the Son was in spirit (Jn 4:24). However, He “localized” in the flesh of man in order to dwell among us in this world.

Though we may not understand all the implications of the incarnation of the Son of God, it is evident that God “localized” in some way on earth within the form of flesh that could be handled and touched (1 Jn 1:1-3). The flesh could be touched, nevertheless, the Deity that is spirit, could not. Therefore, the incarnation was necessary in order for the Father to offer for us His Son in bodily form.

At this point in time (the incarnation), a “personality” of God (the Son) focused here on earth in a fleshly body for a special purpose. Such affirms that beyond the physical dwelling (the body), Jesus as Deity before the incarnation was not here or there. He was God in omnipresent existence in eternity. **What He was on earth was in contrast to what He was in eternity.** In the incarnation He took on human characteristics, and thus,

human location in respect to the position or relationship that people have with one another. Therefore, in the state of incarnation, God the Son was “here” or “there.” But in the heavenly state in the spirit, God the Son was neither “here” nor “there.”

When considering the omnipresence of God, David felt extremely human in understanding. “*Such knowledge,*” he wrote, “*is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it*” (Ps 139:6). He was right. These things are beyond human comprehension. By inspiration David tried in Psalm 139:7-12 to help us understand the marvelous omnipresence of God.

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.*

**We are not the servants of a God who is confined to some loca-**

**tion in order to have a relationship with mankind.** If one should so think that God must be in a particular location in order to be close, then God would ask,

*Am I a God near at hand,” says the Lord, “and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” says the Lord; “do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord (Jr 23:23,24).*

God is present at all times—He is close—because in Him we live, move and have our being.

The omnipresence of God the Holy Spirit is a difficult concept to understand since omnipresence is not a characteristic of man. Nevertheless, we must understand the nature of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the context of the omnipresence of Deity. **The metaphorical use of earthly defined words can take us only so far in comprehending the being and presence of God the Holy Spirit.** Our imagination must take it from there. When we discuss the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit, therefore, we must not debate over our imaginations concerning the interpretations of metaphors. How can we possibly understand that which is beyond our experience?

Disputing over metaphors that were meant to take our minds into the

realm of the supernatural is futile. The extent of our argument often defines the level of our inability to appreciate the Holy Spirit’s use of metaphors in order to explain His presence and relationship with the people of God.

The Bible states that the Spirit indwells the Christian. However, determining the nature of the indwelling, we are urged to ask some questions about things we do not understand. To ask the questions, and subsequently receive no answers, does not frustrate us. We will never understand everything about the indwelling work of the Spirit. However, we do need to caution ourselves about attaching human definitions to words that the Spirit used to explain a divine relationship that He has with us. The problem often comes when the Spirit used metaphorically our words to communicate a divine relationship, while we argue over the literality of the words.

When we come to the Scriptures, we must therefore caution ourselves not to humanize God with our terms of location. We must not impose on the Spirit some degree of incarnation that was unique only with God the Son in the flesh.

Men in general often have a Jewish or Greek concept of God’s presence and existence. In some cases, we are still struggling to overcome a childish concept of God who suppos-

edly has long white hair, an old looking face, and sits on a great white throne on a cloud. In our literalization of figures of speech in the Bible, and lack of recognition of great biblical metaphors, we fail to allow the Holy Spirit to take our minds beyond the metaphors of this world. In literalizing the metaphors, we have

cheated ourselves of greater understandings concerning the nature and being of God and His relationship with His children. We must in the end conclude that God is far beyond our comprehension, and therefore, we must never confine Him to the definition of our earthly words.

## Chapter 8

### KEY CONCEPTS

Understanding the indwelling of the Spirit leads us into the realm of the mystery of God simply because it is difficult for us who live in a physical world to comprehend the nature of the omnipresence of God in a spiritual realm. We do not understand those things of God's work and influence that cannot be revealed through the medium of humanly defined words. Therefore, we would be cautious about limiting God's work in the affairs of man by our lack of understanding of either His work or environment.

It is often not so much the fact that God does not reveal certain aspects of His work, but that He cannot, through our humanly defined vocabulary, explain Himself. Therefore, we must not frustrate ourselves by trying to understand or explain everything concerning God's work in this world. There are so many things

that are just beyond our understanding.

Nevertheless, God has revealed some things concerning the age to come that will need further explanation when we arrive at the time of fulfillment of those things. We are assured that we will receive another dictionary in the world to come that will define concepts about which we presently have only a little understanding. We do not now understand fully the concept of heaven. However, someday our questions will all be answered.

There are some things concerning God's relationship with us now that we do not fully understand. This does not frustrate us. We walk by faith and will soon have our questions answered. We must not, therefore, be so presumptuous as to claim that we now understand everything the Bible states, especially those things that are

yet to come. Paul surely had this point in mind when he wrote, “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known*” (1 Co 13:12).

Therefore, in our investigation of the indwelling of God, **we must caution ourselves not to add concepts where the Scriptures do not infer.** This study needs no personal footnotes. We must not force our earthly definitions on the Spirit in order to assume that we understand everything concerning the person and work of the Spirit. This is often a major problem in the study of the indwelling and work of the Spirit. This is especially true among those who are experientially based in their faith.

The religious environment in which we live too often dictates to us what we should believe. Bible students are too often too eager to promote assertions about that which God does not expect us to fully understand. Therefore, we must be cautious to limit our understanding of the Spirit’s relationship with the Christian to what is revealed. If we come to a particular statement in the Scriptures that we do not fully understand concerning either the person or work of the Spirit, then we must resort to that which God expects us to believe concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. **This is the fact that the Spirit will be and do**

**for us that which He is to do, regardless of our knowledge or complete understanding of the matter.**

Most of the confusion in biblical studies concerning divine matters usually excels in those areas where revelation is only partial or even lacking. In those areas where there is little information, we seem to have an uncontrollable urge to fill in the gaps with our logic and deduction, and worst of all, our subjective experiences. If we are religiously experiential, then our imagination often goes wild.

We are certainly allowed to reason and deduct in reference to biblical interpretation. However, we must realize that our logic and deductions are simply human. And since they are human, then we must realize that human thinking is subject to fallibility.

**Good Bible students should always know their Bibles well enough to be able to rightly divide between theological speculations and revealed biblical facts.** There is nothing wrong with speculation and opinion as long as we do not contradict clearly understood teachings that come to us as imperative commands or declarative statements. However, one must constantly guard himself against boldly presenting his speculations as accepted dogma that are beyond simple declarative statements in Scripture. The old principle of

Bible interpretation is still true: **It means what it says and it says what it means.** When we seek to go beyond this with our speculations, then we often get ourselves in trouble. If we go beyond imperatives and declaratives, and depend on our experiences, we will often end up as a cult.

When discussing God's relationship with humanity, metaphors are used to express concepts for which we have no human words. Therefore, we must guard ourselves from dogmatism in this realm of study. Because God's relationship with the believer is greater than the empirical experiences of man, the Spirit often used metaphors in revelation in order to expand the imagination of the Bible student.

By giving us metaphorical glimpses through revelation throughout the entire Bible of that which is beyond our world, the Spirit wanted to direct our thinking above the material world. Therefore, we should not seek to humanize great spiritual concepts that refer to the realm of the spirit world. In our often trifle debates to literalize inspired metaphorical revelation, we have often failed to grasp the intimate relationship the Father, Son and Spirit seek to have with us.

With the preceding thoughts in mind, the following are some defini-

tions, or understandings, that must be noted concerning the subject of the indwelling relationship God has with the Christian:

### A. "Indwelling":

In the New Testament there are four different Greek words that are used to reveal the concept of the indwelling of God. These are common words of the Greek language. They are used both metaphorically and literally. The context in which they are used must define whether a literal meaning or a metaphorical meaning is necessary. However, when these words are used in reference to the existence, presence and work of Deity, our first principle of interpretation is to understand them metaphorically.

**1. *Oikeo*:** This word means "to dwell in."<sup>9</sup>:Vine It means to "live, dwell, have one's habitation."<sup>10</sup>:Arndt & Gingrich Thayer stated that it means "to dwell in."<sup>11</sup>:Thayer This is the concept that either literally or metaphorically, habitation is established in a relationship with someone or some thing. When used in reference between God and man, our first interpretation of the word must be metaphorical. This is true simply because we must be cautious about locating God to be somewhere in reference to that which is material. Only in the incarnation was

God located, for the Son of God was located in the flesh of man.

**2. Katoikeo:** This word means to “live, dwell, settle (down),”<sup>10:Arndt & Gingrich</sup> “to dwell, to settle, inhabit,”<sup>11:Thayer</sup> “to settle down,”<sup>12:Young</sup> “to inhabit, dwell in.”<sup>13:Abbott-Smith</sup> Again, we must be cautious in using this word in reference to an omnipresent God who is everywhere in reference to anything that is of this material world.

**3. Meno:** This Greek word means “to remain”<sup>12:Young</sup>, “to remain, abide,”<sup>11:Thayer</sup> “remain, stay, abide,”<sup>14:Arndt & Gingrich</sup> “to stay, abide, remain.”<sup>13:Abbott-Smith</sup> This word is often used to refer to that which abides or remains within. Metaphorically, it would mean that God has established a close abiding relationship with something of this world.

**4. Enoikeo:** This word means “to dwell in,”<sup>13:Abbott-Smith</sup> to “live, dwell (in).”<sup>14:Arndt & Gingrich</sup> Vine adds that *enoikeo* is used “with a **spiritual significance only**.”<sup>9:Vine</sup> In other words, the word in reference to Deity is only used metaphorically. Thayer states that with *en tini* (“in you”) it is “**everywhere metaphorically**” used in the New Testament with the dative of person.<sup>11:Thayer</sup> He defines the word “to dwell in one and influence him (for good).”

Few interpreters have clued in on what Thayer was trying to say when he emphasized the metaphorical use

of the word *enoikeo* when used in reference to the indwelling of God. In his definition of the word, Thayer was stating that one should look beyond the literal understanding of what is actually stated, and focus on the metaphorical use of the word. One should study closely some of the passages he gave as examples of God indwelling the saints (See Rm 8:11; Cl 3:16; 2 Tm 1:5,14).

All of the above Greek words are used in the New Testament to define the indwelling of different things, individuals or concepts. Sin dwells (*oikeo*) in us (Rm 7:17,20). Satan dwelt (*katoikeo*) in the city of Pergamum (Rv 2:13). Those who love their brother abide (*meno*) in the light (1 Jn 2:10). Those who believe will not abide (*meno*) in darkness (Jn 12:46). Paul talked about the will to sin that dwelt (*oikeo*) in him (Rm 7:18). Then there is the righteousness that dwells (*katoikeo*) in the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13). The truth (or teachings) abides (*meno*) in Christians (2 Jn 2,9). Faith dwells (*enoikeo*) in the Christian (2 Tm 1:5; 3:14,15).

The difficulty often comes in determining whether a metaphorical understanding should be inferred by use of the preceding words, or a literal understanding when a particular word is used in reference to God.

We must agree that the preced-

ing Greek words are often used in a metaphorical sense in reference to indwelling. They are used in this manner concerning the indwelling of God. For example, in Matthew 23:21 Jesus stated that God *katoikeo* (dwelt) in the temple. However, what Jesus meant was that God metaphorically dwelt in the temple. Both Stephen (At 7:48) and Paul (At 17:24) stated that God **does not *katoikeo* (dwell)** in temples made with hands. In other words, God does not literally or personally dwell in any man-made temples. God was not literally in the temple of the Jews. The temple only represented His presence with the Jews.

Because Greek words that are translated “dwell” are often used metaphorically, the biblical interpreter is challenged to be as consistent as possible when interpreting passages wherein this concept is stated. For example, the Greek word *enoikeito* is used in Colossians 3:16 in reference to the indwelling of the word of Christ. It is not debated that *enoikeito* is used metaphorically in this passage. In other words, the Bible is not literally inside an individual. The word indwells the believer insofar as its principles influence one’s life.

Also consider *enoikeito* as it is used in Romans 8:11 and 2 Corinthians 6:16 in reference to the Holy Spirit indwelling Christians. Did Paul

use the word figuratively in Colossians 3:16 with reference to the word of Christ, but then literally in Romans 8:11 and 2 Corinthians 6:16 in reference to the Spirit? Could it not be that the Spirit indwells the Christian insofar as His revealed principles of truth permeate and control the life of the one who has voluntarily submitted to the Spirit’s directions through the word of God?

Therefore, the context must define whether the preceding Greek words are used in either a literal or metaphorical sense. One would certainly find himself in a contradictory situation in various biblical texts to say that the words must always be understood literally. The same would be true if we affirmed that their use is always metaphorical. The fact that the words are used in both a literal and metaphorical manner challenges us to always allow the context in which the words are used to define the meaning of the words.

In reference to the phrase “in you” (*en humin*), Thayer stated that in the dative of person the phrase *en humin* is **everywhere metaphorically used**. Thayer stated that the phrase means “to dwell in one and influence him (for good): *en tini* in a person’s soul, of the Holy Spirit, Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim. 1:14.”<sup>11</sup>:Thayer

Therefore, in many passages where this phrase is used, the meta-

phorical understanding of the phrase should be understood. For example, Christ is “in you” (*en humin* - Cl 1:27), God is “in us” (*en hemin* - 1 Jn 4:15,16), the signs of an apostle are “in you” (*en humin* - 2 Co 12:12), the word of Christ is “in you” (*en humin* - Cl 3:16), the Spirit is “in you” (*en humin* - Rm 8:9,11; 1 Co 3:16).

The metaphorical use of *en humin* emphasizes the **influence** that is exerted over or in the individual that is indwelt. The Scriptures dwell in us because of their influence over us. Those who are living the gospel that is revealed in the inspired word of God, are living in response to what the word of God states concerning the gospel. In this way, the Holy Spirit is working in us through the gospel that He inspired to be written in the word of God. We must not discount the possibility that this is the understanding we must take away from the Scriptures in reference to our living in response to the power of the gospel.

## B. “Personal”:

The word “personal” is commonly used in biblical studies to define the indwelling of the Spirit in the body of the Christian. When the phrase “personal indwelling” is used, reference is to the actual, real and literal presence of the Holy Spirit located in the physical body of the

Christian. As the spirit of a man dwells in the physical body, so the Spirit of God is also believed to be located in the body of the believer.

However, we would caution ourselves in the use of words and phrases as this that are not used in the New Testament to define spiritual concepts. The word “personal” **is not used in the New Testament** to define or identify the nature of the indwelling of the Spirit, or even the Spirit’s relationship with the Christian. The New Testament simply states that the Spirit dwells in the Christian. We may consider this to be personal. However, this “personal indwelling” relationship does not explain how Spirit indwells. Neither does the word “indwell” explain the **nature** of the indwelling.

As Bible students, therefore, we must accept the truth of the Spirit’s indwelling. Understanding the implications of His indwelling has proved to be a little more difficult to understand simply because we seek some spiritual relationship with God that is tangible, or at least explained in a way that we can understand.

Though the word “personal” is not used in the Bible in reference to the indwelling of the Spirit, it is a word that describes the close and unique relationship the saints have with the Spirit. No better word could possibly have been used, and thus,

most Bible students are content to use the word without explanation to refer to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Christian.

### C. Medium and means:

These two words are commonly used in discussions concerning the indwelling of the Spirit. By medium or means, it is understood that the indwelling of God is through the representation of something in order that a spiritual outcome result from the indwelling. In other words, it is stated that the Father dwells in the Christian. However, the Father dwells in a heavenly environment. Therefore, the Father must indwell through proxy or the representation of something or someone other than the Father Himself in order to influence the Christian.

The Father is said to dwell in the Christian through the representation, or medium, of the truth of the gospel that permeates the will of the indwelt individual. The concept of indwelling, therefore, would at least refer to man's submissive relationship to God who has revealed the gospel to us, and subsequently, seeks in our lives a response to the gospel. When we respond to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, it is then that we know God. When one knows God through an obedient response to the gospel, then it is said that God dwells in that

person. When one continues to live in response to the gospel of Jesus, then we understand that God indwells that person. This is in the meaning of what the Holy Spirit revealed in the following statement:

*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and manifests the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place. For we are to God a sweet fragrance of Christ, in those who are being saved and in those who are perishing (2 Co 2:14,15).*

### D. Manner of indwelling:

The fact of the indwelling of God is without question. This is a fundamental teaching of the New Testament. **How** God indwells the Christian is subject to some discussion. It is subject to discussion because the word "indwell" focuses more on influence, than location. And in reference to influence, we must assume that one's initial response to the gospel in baptism continues on throughout life. The power of the gospel never ceases to influence the heart of the Christian simply because it is the motivation of the incarnate Son of God who inspires one to live the gospel (See Ph 2:5-8; Cl 3).

It is not arrogant to wonder or question how God continues to have

a working relationship with the saints. God does work in His own ways, which ways are usually beyond our comprehension. Deuteronomy 29:29 does teach that God conceals some concepts that He has not revealed. However, it is not presumptuous to wonder and consider those things that have been revealed to us.

Consider also the leadership of the Spirit in our lives. Romans 8:14 states that the Spirit leads us. Are we to presume that everywhere we go the Spirit has literally led us there? If this is true, then how would we answer for His supposed leading us to some places wherein we should not be? Therefore, we must investigate **how** the Spirit leads us, lest we blame the Spirit for putting us into situations that are the result of our own bad decisions. Simply stating that we are led by the Spirit does not define where and how the Spirit leads.

When the Scriptures reveal that God dwells in the Christian, our first

inclination is to ask how. Though we may not be able to answer all the questions concerning the indwelling of God in reference to a literal indwelling, at least we must be assured of those things that the Bible clearly states concerning His indwelling. When a truth is clearly stated, then we must accept that truth, regardless of whether we understand all the implications of the truth. When the Bible states that the Spirit indwells the Christian, then we accept such without question, though we do not understand everything about how He indwells us in order to work for our benefit. We simply know that He will do what He is suppose to do in reference to our walk in obedience to the gospel. This confession is not to minimize His work, but to guard ourselves from arrogance. And possibly more important, to guard ourselves from blaming the Spirit for some emotional extravaganzas in which we might involve ourselves.

## Chapter 9

# THE INDWELLING GOD

For many decades there has been a controversy in the religious world concerning the indwelling of the Spirit. Brents stated, “While good and true men differ as to **how** the Spirit is received, all agree that it is received

and in some sense dwells in every Christian.”<sup>15:597</sup> The New Testament does teach the fact of the indwelling. However, the controversy surrounds the manner by which He indwells and the influence He has on our moral

behavior. Howard Winters stated,

“But the **fact** of the indwelling Spirit does not tell us the **method**, the **manner**, or the **how**. The problem, as I see it, does not lie in the fact, but in the method.”<sup>16:11</sup>

Determining the manner by which the Spirit indwells has been a good discussion that has too often moved beyond scholarship. Since we are speculating concerning those things that lie within the realm of the work of God, we would suggest that we set aside our dogmatism for a moment. We can define our presence since we are in a body and located at any particular place at a specific time. However, when we discuss the presence and work of God the Spirit, then we would suggest that we not maintain dogmatic views that are matters of opinion. We must not lest we speak presumptuously concerning the omnipresence and function of the Holy Spirit.

J. W. Roberts presented the following thoughts on this subject:

The proposition that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian only through the Word is a theological judgment or conclusion, since no such statement is set forth as a conclusion or proposition in any passage of the Bible. If it is a true proposi-

tion, it is true only because it is a necessary inference drawn or deduced from all the statements of the Bible. Since the Bible obviously states the indwelling of the Spirit, the above proposition can be established only by denying the plain meaning of the biblical statements and demanding a metaphorical meaning of the language or affirming that the language is metonymy. If the statements about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not to be understood literally, then it must be because other truths or propositions force a different meaning from the literal.<sup>17:n.p.</sup>

Roberts was correct in stating that there is no declarative statement that proclaims that the Spirit indwells through word of revelation. This conclusion comes only from a summation of scriptures from which deductions are made in reference to the indwelling of the Spirit.

If we understand the indwelling to be metaphorical, then what is lost in the meaning of the indwelling of the Spirit? Since it is in God that we live, move and have our being, then certainly we cannot say we are far from God at anytime. There is no such thing as the Christian being distant from God. How can one be distant from Him in whom we live, move and have our being?

L. R. Wilson would represent the

position of those Bible students who believe that the Spirit indwells the Christian as the Christian is influenced by the instrumentality of the word of God. After a review of passages mentioning the indwelling of the Father and Son, He wrote,

Truly there is a difference between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God .... the Word of God, however is “living and powerful”. It is a revelation of the Divine truths given by holy men of God, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to make known God’s will to man. When we receive these truths, these principles, these ideals into our hearts and lives, and make them a part of us, the Holy Spirit will and does come in and dwell within us. The Holy Spirit being one in the Godhead, when we receive the Holy Spirit we also receive God the Father and God the Son.<sup>53:233</sup>

In the following points we must set forth thoughts concerning both views of the indwelling of the Spirit. There are valid points on both sides of this discussion. However, there are also areas that must be subjected to further discussions. The areas of discussion, however, often evolve around our lack of understanding of the Spirit’s being and presence. In other words, we would not presume to make a problem out of something God never in-

tended that we should completely understand in the first place. Neither would we establish as a test of fellowship something that is still open for discussion. We must encourage a spirit of love and unity as we continue our discussions of these most interesting revelations of the Spirit.

It is not that we cannot understand the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The problem of understanding the indwelling is often confused by the deductions of some who have confused the issue. One person’s deductions may conclude one thing, and another person’s deduction another. However, when we sort through the deductions, we must understand that deductions can often be flawed. They are flawed because of our own fallibility, as well as our lack of knowledge on a particular subject. Add to this the fact that discussions concerning the Holy Spirit are often highly emotional. In discussing emotional subjects, the problem of trying to be as objective as possible concerning what the Bible actually teaches on a specific subject is often difficult.

In order to better define the positions that are held by good Bible students on this subject, consider the following points:

### **A. Indwelling through the medium of the word of God:**

Some have affirmed in the past that the Spirit indwells representatively through the medium of the Spirit-inspired word of God. E. G. Sewell explained,

The words of the New Testament are the words of the Spirit; and when these words dwell in us and become the ruling principle of our lives, controlling all our purpose, words, thoughts, and actions, then certainly the Spirit of God and of Christ is dwelling in us; but if we do not keep up all these things, I know of no principle upon which we can claim that the Spirit of Christ and of God dwells in us.<sup>19:640</sup>

Winters added to this point by stating,

It seems to be that everyone understands that God indwells the heart by or through means, or as Paul states it, “through the Spirit.” His mediate or indirect dwelling does not deny or change the fact. So it is with the Holy Spirit. He dwells in the children of God, but He does so mediately, through the truth, the word of God.<sup>16:18</sup>

John A. Schep also wrote,

God personally dwells in us as his will finds acceptance in our hearts.

Christ personally dwells in us as his teachings are followed by our faith. And the Holy Spirit personally dwells in us as we follow the leading of the Spirit through the word. ... God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit indwell Christians, but neither of them dwell inside the Christian in person.<sup>21:In introduction, n.p.</sup>

Most will agree that the Spirit indwells the Christian as His word permeates the life of the Christian. However, there are other considerations that must be understood in reference to the Spirit’s indwelling. So Robert Milligan asked,

But if it [the Spirit] operates on the heart of the Christian only by means of the word of truth, and through the ordinary events of God’s providence, then why does it sustain to him a relation different from that which it sustains to the unbeliever? Why is it **given** to us; and why does it **dwell** in us?<sup>22:282,283</sup>

Milligan’s questions could somewhat be answered by adding that the Christian’s relationship with the Spirit is **a relationship of submission**. Because of the submissive spirit of the individual, the Spirit is able through the direction of the Scriptures to influence and direct the life of the individual.

The unbeliever does not have the spirit of submission, and thus the spirit of sonship. However, we would infer that the Spirit's relationship with the Christian in the general sense is more than through the word of God alone. The Spirit is given to the Christian wherein the Spirit has a relationship with the believer that He does not have with the unbeliever.

It is an undeniable truth that the Spirit indwells the Christian. Indwelling through the permeating Scriptures in one's life is also true. As one submits to the will of God through the direction of the Spirit-inspired word of God, the Spirit is in this way affecting the behavior of the obedient.

We must keep in mind that memorization of the Scriptures does not constitute indwelling. One can have great knowledge of the Scriptures, and yet not be changed by the Scriptures. Knowledge without obedience is the same as faith without obedience. In the eyes of God, faith without works is dead (Js 2:17). In the same tenor, knowledge of the Scriptures without obedience is dead. There is no indwelling of the Spirit through the medium of the word of God in those who do not have a spirit of obedience to the word of God.

Gaius had the spirit of obedience. John wrote to him, "*For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just*

*as you walk in the truth*" (3 Jn 3). The truth of the gospel was in Gaius because he **walked** in the truth. Within him was the spirit of obedience to the truth of the gospel because he had obeyed the gospel. Therefore, the Spirit-inspired truth in word is within one only when he manifests in his life the spirit of an obedient walk through the direction of the word of God.

## **B. Indwelling of the Spirit through the power of the gospel:**

One's relationship with the Spirit begins when one, through a knowledge of the gospel that is revealed in the word of God, obeys the gospel. When we speak of the word of God, we must understand that it is this inspired word that reveals the gospel. When one learns of the gospel through the word of God, and then responds to the gospel of Jesus, it is the Spirit leading through the inspired word of God. There is a difference, therefore, between the gospel of Jesus and the word of God that reveals the gospel to us today.

Our understanding of the leading of the Spirit must not marginalize the gospel. If we focus on a direct leading of the Spirit in the inner man, we are setting aside the power of the gospel to both convert and transform lives. When Paul exhorted the Colossians to separate themselves from the

world, he did not direct them to a direct influence of the Spirit, but to the gospel of Jesus Christ that they had obeyed (See CI 3). Neither did Paul direct them to do more Bible reading and memorization of scriptures. The power to both convert and grow a person in faith is the gospel, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has played His part by inspiring the word of God to be written, which word inerrantly communicates to us the gospel. Our focus on the word of God, therefore, is not on statutes, but gospel.

The Holy Spirit would never bypass the gospel by focusing our minds on Himself as the source of faith. It is His work to glorify Jesus (Jn 16:14). He uses the inspired word of God to direct our minds to Jesus, and by doing this, He stays in the background.

### **C. Indwelling of the Spirit in a personal, literal sense:**

This position is usually held in conjunction with the preceding concept of the indwelling through the word of God. However, the belief here is that the Spirit of God is actually and literally in an individual. The Spirit maintains an “indwelling relationship” with the believer that He does not maintain with the unregenerate sinner. This position is affirmed on the basis of a literal understanding of the word “indwell” and “in” as they

are used in the New Testament in reference to the Spirit’s indwelling. Thus, the Scriptures are stating that the Spirit of God is literally in every Christian throughout the world.

This belief is based on a rule of interpretation that states that **a word or expression must be taken in the literal sense unless the context dictates that such should be understood figuratively**. This is a general principle of biblical interpretation that should be followed in understanding the Bible. However, it is not always applicable to some biblical studies, especially in the context of those scriptures that deal with the divine nature of God and those things that are beyond this physical world. Those words and phrases that speak of God cannot be understood first literally, and then figuratively. The opposite of this principle must be followed.

There are no human words that adequately or fully define the nature of God. In the context of God’s nature and work, therefore, **words or phrases should be first understood metaphorically unless the context dictates that they should be understood literally**. We must understand in a metaphorical sense those words and phrases that are used to explain the nature of God and His work lest we limit the nature and work of God to the definitions of our vocabulary. This simply means that we must not

confine the work and presence of God to our understandings of the physical world.

We must also add that the whole text of Scripture be allowed to determine if a word or concept is to be understood in a metaphorical sense. The whole text goes beyond the context, and therefore, must be considered when studying biblical concepts that permeate the totality of Bible teaching on any specific subject. When the Scriptures state that the Spirit dwells in the Christian, therefore, these statements must be understood in the whole text of the Bible's definition of the indwelling of God. If the whole text of the Bible dictates a metaphorical understanding of the indwelling of God the Spirit, then that understanding must be taken to individual contexts. In other words, **the entire Bible must be the commentary on any one passage of scripture.**

Therefore, the position concerning the literal indwelling of the Spirit is not without its challenges. Marion Fuchs stated,

One of the biggest mistakes of those who teach the doctrine of the literal indwelling is that they do not understand the representative indwelling. They make arguments against the representative indwelling based upon assumptions that are grounded in the literal indwelling doctrine. For in-

stance, they assume the word, "dwell" is always literal and assumes that the word of God dwells literally (at least for the sake of argument) when they make arguments concerning the word dwelling in one by memorization. The word dwells in one by influence, in a representative manner, not literal [sic].<sup>23:n.p.</sup>

Fuchs' objection may also be missing the point of the metaphorical indwelling relationship of God with man. Though it is true that God indwells through the permeating influence of His word, it is also true that the Spirit is trying to communicate sometime greater than a literal understanding of the word "indwell." There is more to indwelling than Scriptures alone. There is more to indwelling than presence alone. **The indwelling of God is a relationship that God the Holy Spirit has with Christians. This indwelling presence cannot be completely explained with a literal understanding of words.**

It is an indwelling that the Spirit has with the believer that He does not have with the unbeliever. It is a unique relationship that the sanctified of God enjoy with the Spirit of God that is not maintained between God and the unbeliever. In other words, it is difficult to ignore the personal indwelling of the Spirit when discussing this subject. The Christian's relation-

ship with God the Spirit is so important that we must always be careful not to disconnect the Spirit of the Christian.

We certainly live in a gospel dispensation, but it is a dispensation

wherein the Spirit of God moves about in order to move the nation of God into eternal dwelling. And in order to do this, He seeks to focus all our minds on Jesus, not Himself.

## Chapter 10

### THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF GOD

It is a clear biblical teaching that God indwells the Christian. Whether this indwelling is literal or metaphorical will probably continue to be debated for years to come. But in order to understand this indwelling, we must believe that there is some metaphorical meaning to the indwelling of the Spirit simply because we are considering God in the spirit in relation to man in the flesh.

Nevertheless, the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer cannot be disputed. The **fact** of the indwelling is true. **How** God indwells will continually challenge our thinking.

The fact that the Spirit does indwell the believer, as the inspired word of God permeates and directs our lives, does not answer all the statements that are made in the Scriptures concerning the indwelling. Much of our problem in understanding the indwelling originates from our lack of defining the metaphors that are used to explain the indwelling. Couple this

with the fact that if one obsesses over the Holy Spirit, he often minimizes his focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ (See Jn 16:14).

There are two different influences that affect the behavior of Christians. Unless one understands that the inspired word of God communicates the gospel, he will have a difficult time understanding how the Spirit uses the word of God to affect our behavior through the power of the gospel. Paul gives a hint in Colossians 3:1 that we must not misunderstand: *“If you then were raised with Christ [in obedience to the gospel], **seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.**”*

Therefore, we must focus primarily on the gospel of God’s grace, then we may make some progress in understanding the indwelling of the Spirit. Words of command often become legal sign posts of merit, but the gospel of the incarnate Son of God

continues to have power in the life of those who seek to walk by faith. The words of the Spirit that communicate this gospel message are inherently powerful because of the power of the gospel. Therefore, when we refer to the influence of the Spirit through the inspired word, we are actually focusing on the gospel that is revealed through the word of God.

We must expand our discussion on this matter in order to go beyond words and suggestions. With reference to the Greek words that were defined under point A, the following concepts on the indwelling of God must be considered:

#### **A. The Father indwells the Christian:**

In 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul referred to God, the Father, dwelling (*enoikeo*) in Israel as He now indwells the Christian (See also Lv 26:12; Jr 31:1; 32:38; Ez 37:26,27). Paul argued that as Israel submitted to God's will, He dwelt in them according to their submission. In like manner, the Corinthians also had to submit in order to be controlled and led by God's will.

John said that "*God abides [meno] in us,*" and that "*whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides [meno] in him*" (1 Jn 4:12,15). In John 14:10 Jesus said that

*"the Father who abides [meno] in Me does the works."* Jesus used the same word in verse 17 when He said that the Spirit of truth "*dwells [meno] with you [the apostles], and will be in you.*" Therefore, as the Father dwelt in the incarnate Christ as explained in verse 10, so He dwelt in the apostles in verse 17.

At the time Jesus made the statement of John 14:10, however, the Father was in the heavenly environment. The Father was both in the heavenly environment, and at the same time, in Jesus who lived in an earthly environment. The nature of God's omnipresence was manifested in this indwelling relationship between the Father and Son at the time of incarnation.

**1. God permeates and controls lives through His instructions.** There is nothing in the above scriptures that refers to a literal, personal indwelling of God the Father in man or in Christ. The Greek words used in the above contexts, therefore, would best be understood metaphorically. **The Father indwells [meno] believers as His will permeates and controls their lives. He indwells as the will of Jesus on earth permeates and controls the lives of those who have responded to the gospel.**

However, a metaphorical understanding of 2 Corinthians 6:16 would take our minds into a spiritual realm

of indwelling. God was with and in the people of Israel. The Father was with and in the incarnate Son. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are now with and in the people of God in a relationship wherein the saint is motivated into action through his or her continued motivation by the gospel. Knowing the closeness of God and His people in this relationship is a comforting concept that is taught in the New Testament.

### 2. *God abides in those who love.*

John's statements in 1 John 4:12,13 harmonizes with the above thoughts:

*If we love one another, God abides in us ....* "By this [our love of one another] we know that we abide in Him ... because He has given us of His Spirit.

John was saying that God abides in us if we love one another. However, the opposite would teach an interesting truth. **If we discontinue loving our brother, God will discontinue abiding in us.** The nature of His indwelling in this context, therefore, seems to be contingent on our loving our brother as ourselves.

### 3. *The Father abode in Christ and abides in the Christian.*

God was not literally in Jesus while Jesus was incarnate in flesh on this earth. Only the Son was incarnate, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Jesus was the per-

sonal representative of God's good news to the world. The Father was in heaven while Jesus was on earth preaching this good news (Jn 14:12). In John 14:10 Jesus explained how the Father indwelt Him while He was on earth:

*Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the **Father in Me?** The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; **but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.***

Jesus taught that the Father was dwelling in Him as He worked the works of the Father and spoke the words of the Father. Indwelling in this context, therefore, meant to work and speak in harmony with God.

In this same sense God would indwell the Christian. As believers allow their lives to be directed by the word of God, God indwells them. The Father works through them. Those who believe on Jesus, obey the gospel. As they abide in His word, God abides in them. Jesus explained,

*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will **believe in Me through their word**; that they all may be one, as You, Father, **are in Me, and I in You**; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me (Jn 17:20,21).*

## B. Jesus indwells the Christian.

Jesus and John affirmed that both the Father and Son dwell in the obedient believer. Jesus said, “*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*” (Jn 6:56). Jesus continued to explain, “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me*” (Jn 15:4-6; see 1 Jn 2:6,28; 3:6,24; 4:13).

Paul revealed that Christ dwells (*katoikeo*) in our hearts through faith (Ep 3:17). This statement agrees with what he said in Galatians 2:20: “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*” Christ was living in Paul because he had “died with Christ” (Rm 6:7). He allowed Christ to direct his life through His word of instruction (Jn 15:7). The commentary of Galatians 2:20 is Romans 6:13:

*And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

One presents his life as an instrument of righteousness when he allows God to permeate and control His life through the power of the gospel that is revealed in the word of God.

Both the Father and Son are now in the believer. However, this is not a literal indwelling as we would literally understand the Greek words *meno* and *katoikeo* that are used to express this indwelling. Since both the Father and Son are now in a heavenly environment (Ep 1:20; Hb 8:1-4), **these words must be understood metaphorically.** The Father and Son, therefore, must indwell representatively, that is, through the medium of our continued response to the gospel that we obeyed, which gospel is revealed through the inspired word of the Holy Spirit.

**1. Jesus makes His home in the obedient.** At least the Father and the Son abide in the Christian as the Christian has submitted his or her will to the instructions of God. Jesus said, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me*” (Jn 14:21). He continued, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him*” (Jn 14:23).

The Father and Son make their home in the heart of the one who has submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus. They instruct the faithful subjects of the kingdom through the word of King Jesus (See Jn 12:48). We must connect this thought with what Paul said in Colossians 1:27: “*To*

them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**" Paul also wrote the following to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ..." (Cl 3:16).

**2. Jesus dwells in us through the faith.** Faith and love move one to obey the commandments of Jesus (Jn 15:14). His commandments are Spirit-inspired from the Father. Winners rightly stated,

But faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Thus we must conclude that Christ dwells in Christians mediately, by faith which comes by hearing the word, precisely in the same manner as God the Father dwells in them.<sup>10:18</sup>

When one submits to the word of Christ, both the Father and Son make their home in the heart of the submitted. **God thus indwells as one allows his life to be controlled by the leading of the words of Jesus.** It is the obedient, therefore, to whom Jesus spoke the following words: "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*" (Jn 6:56).

There is a difference between faith and "the faith." Faith refers to those who accept "the faith." Faith refers to us. "The faith" refers to that

which was revealed from God, and through which faith He indwells those who are obedient to "the faith." In the sense that we submit to the commandments of Jesus, Jesus dwells in our hearts **through the faith.** Paul wrote "*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through [the] faith*" (Ep 3:17). The Greek article "the" is in the text here before the word "faith." Therefore, the text should literally read, "*through the faith.*"

"The faith" is the sum of all that God has revealed to man. This is the truth of the gospel. It is also the totality of God's life-giving actions and principles of grace by which men are to be saved. It is one's personal faith that motivates one to respond to the faith of the gospel. Therefore, when one is moved by faith, he obeys the faith. When this occurs, then Christ dwells in one's heart through the faith.

**3. Jesus dwells in the obedient.** One must voluntarily allow Jesus to dwell in his heart. Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*" (Rv 3:20). If one does not accept and obey the gospel, then God does not dwell in Him. John wrote,

*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the*

*doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son* (2 Jn 9; see 1 Jn 3:24).

This passage teaches that as one keeps the will of God, he **has** both the Father and Son. Therefore, obedience to God's word is directly connected to the "having" (indwelling) of God.

**4. Jesus dwells in those who abide in His commandments.** By continuing to respond in a positive manner to the commandments of Jesus, Jesus will continue to abide in the one who is obedient to what he hears. Jesus **commands** us to abide in Him as He so commanded the apostles: "*Abide in Me, and I in you*" (Jn 15:4). "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered*" (Jn 15:6). Therefore, Jesus warned, "*If you [apostles] abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*" (Jn 15:7).

In order for Christ to abide in us, we must obey instructions as Paul's statement in Colossians 3:16 concerning submission to the word of Christ: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*" As Jesus, Paul was here giving an imperative command. In order for Jesus to abide in the heart of the believer, we must respond in a positive manner to what He instructs. In this sense, therefore, the indwelling of Jesus is commanded.

The preceding imperative commands concerning indwelling make sense only if we understand that the individual believer can make a voluntary response to the will of Jesus. This makes the indwelling conditional. It is conditioned upon the voluntary response of the believer to the word of Christ.

Therefore, there is certainly an "indwelling" taught in the New Testament in reference to the Christians positive response to the will of Christ. This is an indwelling that depends on the faithful obedience of the believer. However, we also assume that there is an indwelling presence of the Spirit that is beyond words and obedience.

### **C. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian.**

We must first consider that the Father and Son dwell in the Christian in a representative manner, that is, not literally or personally, but through the representation of the Spirit. Roy Lanier explained,

The Father and the Son dwell in us representatively. Paul tells us that "we are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:22.) From this we learn that God the Father dwells in us as the representative of the Holy Spirit and our text shows that Jesus dwells in us in the

representative of the Holy Spirit so the first and second persons of the Godhead do not dwell in us personally, but they dwell in us representatively, in the person of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.<sup>18:202</sup>

Though one might disagree with this interpretation of Ephesians 2:22—more on this later—it is affirmed that the Father and the Son dwell in the Christian through the representation of the Spirit. There is no scripture that specifically states that the indwelling of the Spirit is literal or personal, though we would assume a literal and personal indwelling of the Spirit by literally interpreting statements that refer to His indwelling. The definition of how this indwelling exists may not be fully understood, but it is a biblically stated fact.

In a real sense, the Holy Spirit indwells as He controls our minds through the influence of the word of God. This is not a direct, and thus a subjective control. It is a control that is revealed through an individual's submission to the Spirit-inspired directions of the word of Christ.

We can never separate the word of God from the Spirit, though we can separate the Spirit from His inspired word. This is **not** to say that the Spirit is the word. It is **not** to say that the Spirit's work is limited only to the

word. It **is** to say that as the word of the Spirit permeates and directs the behavior of the individual, that person is being led by the Spirit. That person is being indwelt by the Spirit.

God has revealed His will to us through the Spirit-inspired word. When our lives manifest the nature and characteristics of God as explained in that word, then we can truly say that God is in us. We can in this sense also affirm that His Spirit is in us. H. Leo Boles explained,

As God and Christ dwell in us through the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit dwells in us through his agent, the word of truth. “My little children, of whom I am again in travail **until Christ be formed in you.**” (Gal. 4:19.) **For Christ to be “formed” in us is the development of the spiritual life; this life is developed by the Holy Spirit through his agency, the word of God.** All growth of the regenerated life and character conforms to the laws of the Holy Spirit in all of his workings. When the word of Christ dwells in Christians, the Holy Spirit dwells in them. The Holy Spirit and the word of God are inseparable; the word of God is the word of the Holy Spirit. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16) is the way for Christ to dwell in us; it is the way for the Holy Spirit to dwell in us.<sup>2:208</sup>

We would not limit the work of the Spirit to the influence of the word alone. Neither would we limit the indwelling of the Spirit only to the sense that the Spirit indwells as the word of God permeates the Christian's life. The Scriptures teach a real indwelling of the Holy Spirit, though one must understand that words as "literal," "actual" and "personal" to define this indwelling are not found in the Bible as modifiers of the word "indwell." By using these words, we still have difficulty understanding the nature of the indwelling, for we are dealing with a union between God who is of the spirit world, and individuals who are of the physical world.

We must keep in mind also that our words too often carry with them unbiblical baggage that is often brought over from the misguided religious world in which we live. Nevertheless, the Spirit's presence with and in the Christian is a divine mystery. It is a concept accepted on the basis of trusting in God's initiative to work as He desires, regardless of our finite understandings.

It must be emphasized again that there is no scripture that directly links the work of the Spirit with the personal indwelling of the Spirit. In other words, what the Spirit does is not dependent on "where" He is. The Spirit has always worked in the lives of

God's people. However, the Scriptures teach that He has a special indwelling relationship with all Christians in this age. From what is revealed in the New Testament, it is apparent that He did not have this relationship with all of God's people before the first person on the day of Pentecost obeyed the gospel. However, the Spirit's work in the lives of God's people before Acts 2 was not hindered, though He did not have the unique relationship with the people of God before the cross as He maintains today with all Christians. For this reason, we must always understand that what the Spirit does in relation to the Christian today is not contingent on His indwelling.

The above must be affirmed lest we place the Spirit in a dormant state in the history of the world before Pentecost. We know that He was active before Acts 2. He was active not only in a miraculous way in Israel, but also in forming the behavior of men through inspired words of direction.

No part of the Godhead has been inactive since the creation of the world. Though the particular works of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have changed, their works have always existed. They have always been active in the world in order to bring about the purpose for which the world was created.

We must also refrain from mov-

ing the Spirit into an existence of dormancy after Acts 2. He was miraculously active in the first century in order to confirm the gospel, and God's gospel messengers. He continues to work today in the lives of Christians throughout the world. He inspired documents of His confirming miraculous work in the first century, and now

He works through the preaching of that word to bring people to a knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He also continues to work in the world outside the presence of the personal presence of the saints. God the Spirit continues to work in order to bring God's eternal plan of salvation to a conclusion in the history of the world.

## Chapter 11

### KEY STATEMENTS ON THE INDWELLING

We must continue to remind ourselves of the miraculous gifts context of the early church, especially during those 25-30 years when there were no written New Testament documents in circulation. The miraculous gifts were abundantly present in the work and edification of the early Christians. It would be logical in our biblical interpretation, therefore, to first understand passages in the New Testament in their first century context before we apply them to ourselves today. This is especially true in reference to the ministry of the Spirit through the miraculous gifts.

We must never forget that when the New Testament letters were written, the miraculous gifts existed among most of the early disciples. Therefore, we would assume that in the letters to the churches, the mention of the Holy Spirit must first be

interpreted in the context of the ministry of those who possessed the gifts.

We are secondary recipients of the New Testament letters, which means that when the letters speak of the Holy Spirit, we must interpret these passages as if we were among those first disciples wherein someone was ministering with a miraculous gift. Therefore, we must strive to rightly divide what first applies to the historical context of the first century disciples, and then what applies to our context today. When studying the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, we have found that most Bible interpreters fail to recognize that the letters were written to disciples who had no copies of any books of the Bible.

The following are key passages on the indwelling relationship the Spirit had with the early Christians.

We must caution ourselves to understand these passages **exactly for what they say without reading into them preconceived ideas, and especially experiential theologies that are so common throughout the religious world today.**

It is always a difficult task for the interpreter to allow the Bible to speak for itself. Nevertheless, we must understand the following statements of Scripture in their historical context before we make any interpretive applications to ourselves today:

#### A. **Matthew 28:18-20:**

In this passage Jesus said to baptize those who had been discipled to Jesus *“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* Some have misunderstood this passage by saying that Jesus was here giving instructions on something that must be said at the time one is baptized. The fact is, however, that Jesus revealed to us what actually happens in the spiritual realm when one is baptized.

The Greek word “in” (*eis*) in this passage refers to a **relationship**. The language of the passage indicates that when one is baptized, he or she is baptized into a relationship with **God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. It is not that one comes into a special relationship with only one manifestation

of the Godhead. **When one is baptized, he is brought into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** From what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, therefore, one comes into a special relationship with the totality of the Godhead, not just the Holy Spirit.

The Godhead always works in harmony as one. Therefore, the Spirit’s relationship with the Christian should not be understood in any way that marginalizes the relationship the Father and Son have with the baptized disciple. The work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian must be viewed as the work of God, for the Spirit is one with God the Father and God the Son.

#### B. **1 Corinthians 3:16:**

The disciples throughout the province of Achaia were **as a whole** the temple of God. Paul reminded them, *“You [all the disciples of all Achaia] are the temple of God. ... the Spirit of God dwells in you.”* The Spirit, therefore, indwells the church as a whole, though this does not mean that this is the only place of His dwelling.

The metaphor, “temple of God,” is taken from the Old Testament. The Jews often viewed God’s presence to be in the temple, though this was only a figure of His dwelling in Israel.

People are the church, which is the resident “place” of God on earth, though God is in heaven. **Emphasis in 1 Corinthians 3:16 is on the church of people as a group, not the individual members.** Therefore, the Spirit indwells the individual members of the church as He indwells the entire body. Paul’s emphasis is in recognizing the church as a whole as God’s place of residence on earth because it is the church of His people. God was in the Achaian church, not in the pagan temples of Corinth.

### C. 2 Corinthians 6:16:

Paul wrote, “*For you [as the church] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them.’*” In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul quoted from Ezekiel 37:27. (The entire statement of 2 Corinthians 6:16 is a reference to the concepts that are taught in Ex 29:45; Lv 26:12; Jr 31:1; Ez 37:27.)

The pronoun “I” in Ezekiel 37:26 must refer to the Godhead as it refers to God in the whole context of Ezekiel 37. Paul argued against the Corinthians’ association with the pagan temples of Corinth. The Corinthian disciples were in a covenant relationship with God because of their individual obedience to the gospel. God was in them. They were in God. Therefore, Paul argued that because

God was in them, they must not be “*unequally yoked with unbelievers*” who were not in a covenant relationship with God (2 Co 6:14). They must, “*Walk in the Spirit*” (Gl 5:16).

### D. Ephesians 2:22:

To the Ephesians Paul wrote, “*In whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*” As in 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul here referred to the corporate body of believers, the church, as the spiritual dwelling place of God. The church is a “*spiritual house*” (1 Pt 2:5). It is the spiritual habitation of God on earth. As Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Ep 3:17), so God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell the church as the church exemplifies the nature of God in the world.

**1. “Are being built”:** This phrase in Ephesians 2:22 indicates that the Ephesian disciples were in the process of building. Reference here is to spiritual growth, not physical growth in numbers. Their spiritual growth as a whole was not something that had happened at one time in the past. They were growing spiritually since the time of their birth into Christ. They were growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

Paul had earlier spoken person-

ally to the Ephesian elders the following: “*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*” (At 20:32). As the Ephesians continued to focus their minds on things that are above, they continually put off the ways of the world (See Cl 3:1-17).

**2. “In the Spirit”:** The phrase “in the Spirit” in Ephesians 2:22 refers to **the spiritual nature of the indwelling relationship they had with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. This phrase in the New Testament would be translated best with the words “by” or “through” the Spirit. The passage is discussing a “habitation” relationship of God with the members of the body. The emphasis in the passage, therefore, is on the relationship of Deity as a whole with the members of the body.

The church is a spiritual habitation in which God spiritually dwells. The phrase “in the Spirit” corresponds to the holy temple **in the Lord** in Ephesians 2:21. The Lord in verse 21 is not expressing instrumentality. Emphasis is on how the temple is holy, that is, in its relationship with the Lord. Emphasis in the context of Ephesians 2:22, therefore, is on the church of believers being built up as the spiritual dwelling place of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The spiritual dwelling place of the Ephesian church was being built up **by** the Spirit. Since we must first interpret the meaning of this passage in its historical context, we would conclude that the Spirit was working among the Ephesian disciples through the miraculous gifts in order to build them up. They had no Bibles to read. However, on many occasions Paul had visited them and laid hands on them in order that they receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we would correctly conclude that the Spirit was building them up through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the miraculous gifts of those on whom hands had been laid.

The Spirit still builds churches today. He builds through the instrumentality of the word of God to which Paul had commended the Ephesian elders (At 20:32). Churches that do not rely on the word of God will not be built on the foundation of the truth of the gospel that is revealed through the word of God. They will be tossed to and fro in a world of false teachings (Ep 4:11-16).

## **E. Colossians 2:9:**

Paul wrote of Jesus, “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*” **This passage cannot be stating that all that is the Father, Son and Spirit “bodily” and liter-**

**ally indwelt Jesus while He was on earth.** At His baptism, the Father spoke with a voice that “*came from heaven*” (Mt 3:17). The Father was in heaven while the Son was in the flesh and on the earth during Jesus’ baptism. Nevertheless, the Father **indwelt** the Son. In this sense, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can indwell, but at the same time not be in the **physical location of the one in whom they indwell.**

Consider this concept in relation to the Holy Spirit, who at Jesus’ baptism, “*descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him [Jesus]*” (Lk 3:22). Are we to understand that all that the Holy Spirit is, was confined to the body of a dove? Certainly not! Such thinking fails to understand the nature of the omnipresence of Deity. The passage does not teach the incarnation of the Holy Spirit into the bodily form of a bird. What it does say is that “**like a dove**” the Spirit signaled His presence with the Son on earth, though He existed separate from Jesus at the time He was in the flesh.

The word “like” is a simile, and a simile is a type of metaphor. Therefore, because the Spirit signals His presence with the Son in the form of a dove does not mean that He left His presence in the rest of the world at the time of Jesus’ baptism. He was still with John the Baptist who at this time was still preaching in the wilder-

ness. In other words, at this particular event and time in history, the Spirit was not confined to the location of a dove’s body.

This is a very important concept of God that we, who are subject to time and location, find difficult to understand. Therefore, because of our inability to understand such concepts of omnipresence, we should be cautious about binding our understanding of physical locations on God. In other words, **for the Father, Son and Spirit to indwell, they do not have to indwell according to our understanding.** To say that Deity must indwell according to our understanding is to bind our earthly understandings on that which is not of this world. Nevertheless, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell the Christian at least on the basis that the Christian has submitted his life to the will of God.

What Paul meant in Colossians 2:9 was that the Father, Son and Spirit are so completely one in nature, purpose and character, that where one is in “location”—a reference solely to the time of the incarnation—there the others are also. The completeness of the nature, purpose and character of the Father indwelt the Son while the Son was “located” on earth in the body of a man.

The word “dwell” in Colossians 2:9 is in the **present tense.** In other

words, at the time Paul was writing the statement, the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus. The fullness of God was in Jesus when He was once in bodily form on earth, but also while He is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

In a similar sense, the Father, Son and Spirit indwell the obedient believer who has responded to the gospel. When one's nature, purpose and character coincide with that of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is true that God indwells the believer. However, if we force the omnipresence of God to conform to our human concept of location, we will often misunderstand this aspect of the indwelling of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We must remember that God is omnipresent. This places God everywhere at all times. In this sense, the Christian has a special relationship with God who is here and personally present in his life. However, because God is "here" and "in" us does not mean that He is not "there." The indwelling of God does not "dislocate" Him from being somewhere else.

Some have affirmed that because the Spirit indwells the Christian, He is therefore not anywhere else. Such is an attack against the omnipresence of God by confining God to our human vocabulary.

## G. 2 Timothy 1:14:

*"That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us."* In the context of this statement, no written Scriptures were in common circulation. The "good thing" that was committed to Timothy would refer to the truth of the gospel that was committed to him, which truth he preached by the inspiration of the Spirit. Paul here instructs Timothy, an inspired prophet, to keep this truth of the gospel alive by inspired preaching.

Verse 6 of the same chapter is actually a commentary on this statement. Paul commanded Timothy, *"Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."* Timothy was to guard the "good thing" by stirring up his miraculous gift of preaching the gospel. The "good thing" could be kept only if Timothy bravely stood up against opposition and preached.

In the context of 2 Timothy 1:14, therefore, reference was to the miraculous indwelling of the Spirit to guide Timothy to proclaim the truth of the gospel. He had been intimidated to refrain from using his gift that he had received by the laying on of Paul's hands. The letter of 2 Timothy was meant to stir Timothy into action.

An incidental point that should

be drawn from this and similar statements is that Paul in the context of 2 Timothy could not be discussing the indwelling of the Spirit through the instrumentality of the written word of God. Only a few documents of the New Testament had been written by the time the statement of 2 Timothy 1:14 was written. And these few documents had certainly not been circulated sufficiently in order that it could be said that the Spirit indwelt through the medium of the written word. Therefore, the meaning of passages as 2 Timothy 1:14 was that there was a real and actual indwelling of the Spirit in the lives of the early disciples.

It could be argued that the Spirit indwelt the early disciples in that they had responded to the gospel that was revealed and spoken by the apostles and early prophets. But reference here would not be to the written documents of the New Testament. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit indeed indwelt those who had obeyed the message of the gospel. However, we must not discount the fact that those who obeyed the gospel were living in the age of the gospel dispensation, and thus the age in which God works among us through the Holy Spirit.

## H. James 4:5:

James wrote, “*Or do you think*

*that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’.*” The translation of this verse has long been debated. The *New King James Version* affirms from the above translation the belief that the word *pneuma* (spirit) refers to the Holy Spirit. The *American Standard Version* translators, on the other hand, rendered the passage with the God-created **spirit of man** as the correct reference to *pneuma*: “*Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?*” This is certainly a correct understanding since God is the Father of our created spirits (See Nm 16:22; Ec 12:7; Zc 12:1). This is probably the correct rendering and understanding of the verse since James was asking a rhetorical question. In other words, God did not create a spirit for man that was prejudiced toward sin.

Nevertheless, we would have no difficulty in applying the passage to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The same rhetorical question could be asked by James. Would the Holy Spirit within us lust or yearn jealously? James implies the negative answer, “certainly not!” Regardless of how the verse is translated, the deducted answer is still the same. God is not the author of a “spirit” that is inclined to envy. Nor does the “Spirit” incline one to envy.

## Chapter 12

# INDWELLING TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

In reference to our spiritual growth, we often maintain a legal perspective concerning how spiritual growth takes place. **We relegate the Scriptures and our behavior to a memory-knowledge relationship that too often digresses into a legalistic religion of meritorious behavior.** In other words, we construct a systematic law of doctrinal rites that must be obeyed in order that one earn his salvation.

Add to this the fact that we often feel that the more we know the Bible, the more we will spiritually grow. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. One can have a great knowledge of what the Bible says, and yet not put into practice what he knows. This is often the position of the legalist, as it was with the Pharisees. This is true because legalism moves us to focus on our heads as to how well we are performing law. But gospel moves us to focus on the heart of God, and how we can live His heart in response to His Son.

In contrast to legal living, John wrote of his joy concerning Gaius who was living the gospel of grace: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* (3 Jn 4). Gaius walked in that which he

knew, though at the time John wrote there were few New Testament documents circulating among the disciples. Therefore, when John wrote that his great joy was to hear of disciples walking “in truth,” reference was surely to the truth of the gospel about which Paul also wrote (See Gl 2:5; Cl 1:5).

The Christian today has a spiritual relationship with the gospel, as well as with the complete canon of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are his source of life and guidance. If he walks by the instruction of God’s word, then he will spiritually grow. However, the motivation to respond to the word of God must always be the gospel. If the gospel falls away as our prime motivation, then we are relegated to a religion of legal obedience to rites and rituals.

God promised that His laws would be written on the hearts of those with whom He would establish the new covenant (See Jr 31:31-34; Hb 8:10; 10:16). His laws would be written on their hearts in the sense that those who would choose to come into a covenant relationship with Him would be obedient to the conditions of the covenant. Through the medium of the Scriptures, those who were to

be born into a covenant relationship with God would already **know** God. They would have an intellectual knowledge of Him through the gospel, but most important, they would have identified with Him through their obedience to the gospel.

The truth of the gospel would be **in them** because of their obedience to the truth of the gospel. They would not know God through the memorizing of a list of laws. They would know Him through the gospel of His revealed beloved Son. For this reason, the Son was incarnate in the flesh in order that we might know the one true and living God. It is as Jesus said, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Jn 14:9).

The New Testament explains the covenant relationship that the Christian has with God. The truth of the gospel is in the Christian because of his obedience to the gospel. This is revealed through the New Testament documents (1 Jn 1:8; 2:24; 3:9). The truth of the gospel is in the Christian as he walks in it (1 Jn 2:4). By walking in the light of the truth of the gospel, the Christian knows that he is a son of God (1 Jn 2:5). He knows such because of his obedience to the truth of the gospel (1 Jn 3:10).

### **A. The Scriptures reveal the truth of the gospel.**

The truth of the gospel is spirit and life (Jn 6:63). Our relationship to the word of God that reveals the gospel is not a matter of passages and pages of precept upon precept. The Scriptures constitute eternal values and virtues that are meant to regenerate us out of a vain manner of life through our baptism for remission of sins (At 2:38).

Through the passages and pages of the written word of God, virtues and values are also revealed that affect our eternal destiny. We must not be deceived into believing that there is something legalistic about obeying passages and precepts that have been revealed by God. These eternal values permeate and control the submitted spirit. Behavior is changed. Destinies are changed. It is the gospel of God’s grace that moves us into obedience.

One must understand that when he responds to the gospel, he must be instructed by the word of Christ in order to live the gospel according to the will of God (Cl 3). We need the instruction of the Scriptures lest after our obedience to the gospel we create a religion of behavior after our own desires. It is for this reason that we must lay up in our hearts the word of God lest we stray from the truth of the gospel. If we do not do this, then we will end up with another gospel (See Gl 1:6-9).

## **B. The Scriptures reveal the mind of Christ to all men.**

It is a biblical truth that the word of God dwells within us. Paul commanded, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” (Cl 3:16). By allowing the word of Christ to dwell in us, we in turn have the mind of Christ (1 Co 2:16). The New Testament does not teach that the word dwells in us through the medium of something else. The word of God (the mind of Christ) dwells in us as our lives are spiritually controlled by the principles of God’s will. Therefore, the words are not literally in us. The principles of the word of Christ are in us when we live the gospel according to the will of God.

## **C. The Scriptures bring to us the indwelling God.**

There is substance to the concept that the Spirit indwells the Christian through the medium of the Spirit’s inspired word. The Bible does not actually state that the Spirit, the Father and Son dwell in us through the permeating affect of the Scriptures on our hearts. This exact statement is never made in the Bible. However, the fact that the Scriptures directly control the life of the submitted believer is conclusive evidence of the fact. There-

fore, we would consider it a fair conclusion to affirm that God indwells through His instructions that we implement in our lives. As one’s life is moved to be separated from the ways of this world, it is understood that God is in the life of the sanctified. The Spirit of sonship, therefore, is the spirit of a son being obedient to the will of his Father.

## **D. The Scriptures bring to us indwelling truth.**

Jesus stated, “*Your word is truth*” (Jn 17:17). John added that “*the Spirit is truth*” (1 Jn 5:6). Since we cannot separate the Spirit from the word that He inspired to be written, both the Spirit and the word are truth. John adds that the truth “*abides in us*” (2 Jn 2). It takes little deduction to conclude that the Spirit in this sense abides in Christians through the medium of the indwelling truth that is obeyed.

This indwelling is not memorization of Scripture. This is not a total knowledge of all Scripture. **Emphasis is on one’s submission to God’s values as revealed in the Scriptures.** Winters correctly concluded,

Since the Spirit works through the truth, and since the truth dwells in Christians, it is logical to conclude that the Spirit dwells in Christians through the truth.<sup>10:19</sup>

Winter's concept of the Spirit's indwelling is often difficult for some to comprehend. A student can memorize and recall all points of a teacher's outline and lecture. He can make a perfect score on the final exam. However, a student can do this without capturing the spirit of the teacher's nature. Thus, the teacher's life and spirit are never followed by the student.

In the same way an individual believer can memorize and recall numerous scriptures. He can do such without ever capturing the spirit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not produced because the student distances himself from the Originator of the instruction. On the contrary, submissive students produce the fruit of the Spirit, not only because they have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18), but also because they have first humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God through their obedience to the gospel (1 Pt 5:6).

This is the difference between the "intellectually" motivated student and the student who is truly "led by the Spirit." The intellectually driven person focuses only on the head. The Spirit-led person focuses on both the head and the heart. T. W. Brents explained,

Reading and feeding upon this spiri-

tual food [the word of God], the children of God are "filled with the Spirit"—not because the Word is the Spirit, for it is not—but because the Spirit is ever present in the inspired Word, and the service appointed therein is God's ordained means of giving them the Spirit. Hence, says Paul: "Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom." (Col. 3:16).<sup>15:647</sup>

The truth of the preceding point does not take the place of the indwelling of the being of the Spirit. The point is that the indwelling Spirit seeks to mold our lives through our submission to the word that He inspired to be written. The Spirit seeks a humble heart in which He can abide and work.

**1. *The indwelling word:*** To the hardened Jews, Jesus said, "*But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe*" (Jn 5:38). A very important concept is set forth here by Jesus. The Jews knew the Scriptures. In John 5:39, Jesus stated, "*You [Jews] search the Scriptures ....*" The Jews knew of and had memorized the prophecies concerning the Messiah. However, **their unbelief blocked their interpretation and application of the Scriptures.** In this manner, **the word did not abide in them,** though

they intellectually knew their Bibles.

Because of the Jews' rebellious attitudes, Jesus said to them, "*You do not have the love of God in you*" (Jn 5:42). Their lives could not be changed because of their attitudes. The problem was not their lack of knowledge. The same is true of an unfaithful Christian. One may have a "knowledge of the truth," but because of a rebellious attitude fail to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The love of God is not abiding in the one who is insubmissive to the truth. This is why John declared, "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments*" (1 Jn 5:2).

The truth, therefore, does not indwell through knowledge. Truth indwells when it becomes a part of one's life. Faith without works is dead (Js 2:17). Knowledge without obedience is likewise dead (See Hb 4:1,2). The truth must actively permeate our lives before it can be said that it dwells in us.

**2. *The indwelling seed:*** John stated in 1 John 3:9, "*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*" The word of God, the seed, abides in the Christian (1 Jn 2:14). When this seed abides in the Christian, the Christian is abiding in the Father and Son (1 Jn 2:24). Christians,

therefore, are not leading a life of sin simply because they have submitted to the seed of the kingdom. Their lives are being controlled by the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. In their continued response to the gospel, they seek the instructions from the Spirit through the word of God.

**3. *The walk in the truth:*** The Christian life is a walk in the truth of the gospel. John wrote, "*I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father*" (2 Jn 4). "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*" (3 Jn 4). Paul added, "*Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule*" (Ph 3:16).

*Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God* (1 Th 4:1).

Christians must walk in the light (1 Jn 1:6,7). This walk is the proof of their sonship. And in their sonship they are continually cleansed of sin.

A Christian does not prove that he is a Christian because of the fruit of the Spirit in his life. Such would indicate a spirit of self-righteousness. The self-righteous religionist could

resort to the same evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in his life. However, the self-righteous religionist has not obeyed the gospel, and thus come into a covenant relationship with God.

A child of God can and must submit the evidence that he has obeyed the gospel. He has done this in his obedience to the gospel in baptism. One's spirit of obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ must be the proof that one is a child of God. "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments*" (1 Jn 5:2). Obedience to the gospel of grace separates the child of God from those who may manifest the fruit of the Spirit, but have not obeyed the gospel that is revealed by the Spirit through the word of God.

The indwelling of the Christian by the Spirit of God is the reward for the Christian's covenant relationship that he has established with God. John offers at least one condition for abiding in the Father and the Son: "*If what you heard from the beginning [the truth of the gospel] abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*" (1 Jn 2:24). "*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him*" (1 Jn 3:24). Those who do not "*abide in the doctrine of Christ*" do not have God (2 Jn 9). Those who abide in the teaching will have both the Father and Son. Those who continue to walk in response to the gospel of God's grace are reassured that their eternal life is based on God's grace, and not on a supposed perfect performance of law.

## Chapter 13

### ANSWERED PRAYER

#### (Part I)

It is in the area of prayer that we understand how God works in our lives today. An investigation of the prayers of the biblical writers defines areas in which God works. In other words, if a particular prayer were made or requested in an inspired book of the Bible, **then it is reasonable to conclude that God works in the area for which the request is made.**

If by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit a writer requested that prayers be made for a particular reason, **then it is logical to conclude that God works in the area of the instructed prayer request.** It is for this reason that the subject of prayer helps us to understand the areas in which God works in the lives of Christians today.

It would not be logical to say that

the New Testament writers asked us to pray to God for things that they knew He would not give. Neither would we conclude that God deceived the writers of the Bible documents to ask things He never intended to answer in the first place. Though we may not understand how prayers are answered, the fact is that they are. And because they are, then we can correctly assume that God the Spirit continues to work in our lives today.

It is simply not logical to believe that the things for which the biblical writers asked in prayer could not be answered. For example, Jesus instructed, “*Ask, and it will be given to you*” (Mt 7:7). Also, He did not give Christians a hopeless expectation when He said to His disciples, “*Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them*” (Mk 11:24). The very fact that He asked His disciples to pray is evidence that God worked in their lives in order to answer their prayers. Therefore, we must believe that we receive the answers to our prayers when we follow Jesus’ instructions to pray.

It is essential that Christians develop a sincere life of prayer to God that is based on a belief that God truly works in our lives (Js 1:5,6). We must aspire in expectation for God’s answers to our prayers. Therefore, as we study the Bible in order to deter-

mine how God works in the life of the Christian, we must study those things for which the writers of the Bible directed us to ask and pray.

When we consider God’s answer to our prayers, there is one statement that was made by Jesus that is almost always misunderstood. In order to correct this misunderstanding, we must first remember that Jesus, in His earthly ministry, ministered to the Jews in order to bring their thinking to the fact that He was the fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to the Messiah. But not only did He fulfill the prophecies, He was also the suffering Servant about whom Isaiah prophesied.

The initial disciples of Jesus were Jews. His immediate audience was made up of Jews who knew well their Old Testament prophets, though they had difficulty connecting the dots between Jesus and the prophecies of the Messiah. Nevertheless, in His private teaching of His twelve apostles there was one figure of speech that the Jews understood well because of their past history of survival:

*For truly I say to you, if you [apostles] have faith the size of a mustard seed, you [apostles] will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. And nothing will be impossible to you*

[apostles] (Mt 17:20; see Mt 21:21; Mk 11:23).

This statement was made on the occasion when the disciples' were not able to cast out a particular demon. Because they could not cast out the demon, they came to Jesus privately, after having been embarrassed by their inability to cast out the demon. They then asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. After Jesus chastised them for their "little faith," He made the preceding statement in reference to "this mountain." The common misunderstanding of this statement of Jesus is in reference to the "mountain."

But Jesus was not finished with the preceding exhortation in reference to "mountains." On another occasion, Jesus cursed a fig tree because it did not produce fruit. In answer to the disciples' marvel about the withered fig tree, He made a similar statement that He had earlier made in reference to their inability to cast out the demon: "*If you [apostles] have faith and do not doubt, you [apostles] will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you [apostles] will say to **this mountain**, 'Be removed and cast into the sea,' it will be done*" (Mt 21:21).

The problem is not in understanding what Jesus said, but what He meant in both statements in reference

to moving mountains. Some have unfortunately misunderstood what Jesus was personally saying to His apostles in reference to their faith. Some have concluded that He was referring to moving literal mountains of dirt and rocks if only they had enough faith. In other words, some assume that Jesus used a **hyperbole** (an exaggeration to emphasize a truth) in order to illustrate the power of faith. But if we were Jews who knew well the prophets' use of the word "mountain," then we would think differently.

Therefore, we question the interpretation that Jesus had in mind physical mountains of dirt and rocks. He was not using a hyperbole in reference to moving great mountains of dirt and rocks by a faith that was even as small as a mustard seed. The first indication that He did not have this in mind is in the fact that He made both statements to Jewish disciples. For this reason, we must understand what He was saying in reference to how His Jewish disciples understood the frequent use of the word "mountain" throughout the writings of the Old Testament.

The second reason we question the traditional interpretation of physically moving mountains of dirt and rocks to define one's faith is in what Jesus said in reference to the inability of the disciples to cast out the demon. He said, "*If you have faith the size of*

*a mustard seed.*” A mustard seed is not large, but small. Therefore, the reference is not to a strong faith, but a very small faith. Now consider this if Jesus used the hyperbole of moving mountains of dirt and rocks. For example, since we have no historical evidence that either Peter, James, Matthew or the other apostles literally moved any mountains of dirt and rocks, **then we could suppose that their faith never grew to be at least the size of a mustard seed.** But their faith did grow, and yet, we still have no evidence of them “moving mountains of dirt and rocks.”

In reference to a “mustard faith,” we need to consider the extent to which the apostles faith grew. On one occasion, the religious leaders beat the apostles, and then “*commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus*” (At 5:40). But the apostles left the presence of the Jewish council, “*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (At 5:41). Their faith had grown far beyond a mustard seed. It grew to the point that they could mentally move the mountains of the resistance of the religious leaders of the day.

We would suggest, therefore, that Jesus was not using a hyperbole. He was using the word “mountain” as a **metaphor**. His audience for centuries had used the word “mountain” as a metaphor in prophetic pronounce-

ments. Even in the personal lives of the Old Testament Israelites, the word “mountain” was used as a metaphor as it is often used today.

Mountains are difficult to climb. They were obstacles in one’s journey. Mountains on a journey are in contrast to walking across the plains. Nevertheless, when a mountain had to be climbed in order to finish one’s journey, it had to be overcome. This was the meaning of the metaphor that Jesus used in reference to the obstacles the apostles would personally encounter on their walk of faith. And since Jesus said that they needed only the faith the size of a mustard seed, then they could walk over the obstacles of mountains throughout their lives.

One of those apostles to whom Jesus made this statement was killed by Herod (At 12:1,2). Physical death, therefore was the final mountain that James had to overcome in order to be with His Lord. His faith allowed him to be the first martyr of the apostles. When stones started to be hurled at Stephen, his faith moved him to look unto heaven (At 7:59,60). Death was also his final mountain to climb. The angel to the church of Smyrna would remind all of us: “*Do not fear those things [mountains] that you will suffer .... Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rv 2:10). In other words, have faith, for

even with a faith as a mustard seed one can conquer the fear of death (See Hb 2:14,15).

Life is a journey with several mountains that we must overcome. Before Paul went to the water in obedience to the gospel, Jesus revealed to him all the mountains that he would have to climb throughout his life in order to be victorious (At 9:15,16). Paul later listed for the Corinthians some of the mountains that he overcame through faith (See 2 Co 11:23-28). He overcame so many mountains in living the gospel of Jesus that in one of his last letters to Timothy, he wrote, “*Yes and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution [mountains]*” (2 Tm 3:12).

Only through faith was Paul able to fight the good fight of the faith and stay the course in order to finish his final mountain of death in Rome (2 Tm 4:7). His last mountain to climb was at the hand of an executioner in Rome.

All of us have our mountains to climb. But we must be encouraged by the fact that it takes only the faith of a “mustard seed” to climb and overcome these mountains. Therefore, we must not misunderstand what Jesus promised His apostles. We will not remove any physical mountains of dirt and rocks through our faith. The apostles’ faith was far beyond that of a mustard seed, but they still did not

literally displace any mountains on this earth. The mountains to which Jesus referred would be those obstacles that hinder us in our gospel living. We can trust, however, that ...

*... God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape so that you may be able to endure* (1 Co 10:13).

Think of the preceding statement in view of what Jesus promised the apostles. God will not allow any mountains to be set before us that we cannot climb. This is the first promise to remember when facing the challenge of a mountain. Second, we must remember that God will always give us a passage to walk either over, around, or just straight through any mountain that we may face. This is what James meant in James 1:3: “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience.*”

We rejoice in our trials for two reasons: (1) We know that God will make a way up, over or around any mountain. For this reason, we can rejoice. (2) We also know that we must face the mountains in order to grow in faith. And then we must remember that Jesus said that even a

**“mustard seed” faith will empower us to conquer any mountain that may be in our way.** Therefore, James concluded, *“But someone may say, ‘You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works’”* (Js 2:18). We could apply this to the reality of life by saying, “I will show you my faith by the mountains that I have overcome.”

The preceding is exactly what the heroes of faith did in former times. God gave both Abel and Cain the mountain of offering blood sacrifices. But by faith, Abel climbed this mountain by raising his own blood sacrifices. This was in contrast to Cain who simply collected the fruits of his field with which he had no personal connection (Hb 11:4). By faith Enoch overcame the mountain of wickedness of the generation in which he lived (Hb 11:5). By faith Noah built an ark in view of the impending mountain of destruction that was soon to come upon the face of the earth (Hb 11:7). By faith, Abraham overcame the mountain of having to leave his lifetime friends in the Ur of the Chaldeas (Hb 11:9,10). By faith Sarah overcame the mountain of childbirth in her old age (Hb 11:11,12). All these heroes of faith overcame great mountains, and yet reminded faithful (Hb 11:13). And if we would heed these and other examples of the faith of the

ancients, we too can enjoy the victory of faith (See Hb 11:13-16). We can now understand why John wrote, *“And this is the victory that overcomes the world [of mountains], our faith”* (1 Jn 5:4).

We visit the sick at home or in the hospital who are mentally struggling to overcome some mountain of physical affliction. We pray for them that God may raise them up (Js 5:14,15). Their healing is God’s business, which thing He will do on His own time. But it is our business to call on the Holy Spirit to bring comfort and strength into the life of the afflicted.

Physical affliction is the mountain over which the afflicted must overcome. They need emotional strength. The afflicted, by faith, are strengthened and comforted by knowing that they will mentally overcome the mountain that has been placed before them. By faith they recall that God will not allow them to be tested with a mountain they cannot overcome. By faith we understand that God the Spirit will supply comfort in times of bereavement and strength in times of trial.

We will not, therefore, leave the afflicted on their sick bed with a false expectation that they will be instantaneously healed at the time we say “amen” to our prayer for them. We will not give them a vain promise that

we will meet them immediately after the prayer at the hospital office in order to check them out of the hospital because they have been instantly healed. In other words, we will not make the hospital visit in order to make the afflicted feel even worse about their own faith than before we arrived. We will not give them a false expectation that they should have been healed immediately because of our prayer for them. Or, we will not make them feel that their faith is smaller than a mustard seed, because, we have assumed, that if one had at least a mustard seed faith he or she would be immediately cured of his or her affliction. Some need to ask themselves if they feel worse after the visit of the preacher than before he came and prayed for them. Did the preacher bring down judgment on them because their faith was supposedly not strong enough to be healed immediately?

Those who are afflicted feel better when someone does not judge

them for their lack of faith because they were not immediately cured because prayer has been uttered for them. When the sick are trying to climb emotionally a mountain of physical affliction, they need prayer for strength and comfort, not judgment that they do not have enough faith to be restored to health immediately.

In Jesus' promise of "moving mountains," He was not referring to physical things. He was referring to mental victories over obstacles (mountains) that stand in our way as we live the gospel in a world of suffering and evil. Sometimes the obstacles that stand in our way might be physical. However, there must be a mental victory over mountains. It is our faith that takes us over and beyond all mountains. What Jesus was promising in reference to mountain moving was in reference to minds (faith), not moving literal dirt and rock mountains. The gospel life is a matter of mind over mountains.

## Chapter 14

### ANSWERED PRAYER

#### (Part II)

When we discuss prayer, and God's answer to our prayers, there are key points that define the areas in which God works in the Christian's

life. These are definite areas in which the inspired writers directed the saints to pray in order to call on the intervention of God in our lives. Each re-

quest for prayer that is made in the Bible is an indirect definition of how God the Spirit can and will come to our aid.

Though we may not understand the mystery of how God would bring about an answer to prayer, we must accept the fact that God works in many areas simply because of the Holy Spirit's inspired record of these prayer requests. We should thus be encouraged to do as the Holy Spirit stated in Philippians 4:6: "*Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*"

Not only did the inspired writers make these prayers, but they also encouraged others to pray to God in order to unleash the power of God in their lives.

We must remember, however, that all prayer is answered according to the will of God. When we pray concerning the changing of the normal occurrence of natural law, we must understand that God often wills that we endure our impending mountains in order that our characters be prepared for heavenly dwelling. In other words, the answer to our prayer may be that God wants us to struggle over a particular mountain in order to prepare us to be a more serviceable disciple on earth and a greater resident of heaven (See 1 Pt 1:6,7).

We must not forget this statement: "*For whom the Lord loves He disciplines [with mountains to climb], and scourges every son who He receives*" (Hb 12:6). The Hebrew writer continued, "*If you endure discipline [mountains], God deals with you as with sons*" (Hb 12:7). Therefore, "*do not despise the disciplining [mountains sent forth] of the Lord*" (Hb 12:5). We must remember the following:

*Now no discipline seems to be joyous at the time, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hb 12:11).*

Our prayers may not be answered as we would want them to be answered. Therefore, if we are enduring the trial of a mountain climb, it is good to remember that God is working on our character in order to prepare us for ministry to others who are climbing the same mountain. He is also preparing us for eternal appreciation in an environment wherein ...

*... God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more death nor sorrow nor crying. Nor will there be any more pain, for the former things [mountain climbs] have passed away (Rv 21:4).*

## A. God restores health.

2 Kings 20:1-4 records the fact that King Hezekiah was sick and near death. At the time, this was his mountain to climb. Therefore, Isaiah came to him and said, *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live’”* (2 Kg 20:1). As a result of this pronouncement by Isaiah, Hezekiah *“turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord”* (2 Kg 20:2).

The pronouncement of Isaiah was that Hezekiah would actually die in the near future. The message was from God, and thus, we would conclude that his death would certainly occur. However, Hezekiah prayed that he would not die. After Hezekiah’s prayer, a second proclamation came from God. God said, *“Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father; ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you’”* (2 Kg 20:5).

God worked in the physically sick body of Hezekiah in order to restore it to health. We do not know how God did this. We simply know that God is able to work in the bodies of the physically sick in order to bring about a restoration of the body. He can do this, and yet, do it in a manner that it is not perceived through the senses as a confirming miracle. In other words, this restoration of the

physical body by God would not be considered a confirming miracle simply because such was accomplished in a different manner, and for a different purpose, than the confirming miracles that were recorded to confirm the message and messengers of God in the Bible.

Nevertheless, Hezekiah’s healing was in a sense miraculous. We could say that this was a miracle simply because it was God working in the physical body of Hezekiah. Physical law was set aside in order that Hezekiah live. Since we have no other word to convey what took place gradually, and not instantaneously as in a confirming miracle, then we must believe that something “miraculous” happened. Christians must believe, therefore, that if it is according to the will of God, God can raise up the sick in answer to their prayers (See Js 5:13-16). We may not understand how this happens in reference to the hand of God, but through faith we believe that God can work wonders beyond the limits of our empirical perceptions.

We would conclude that the difference between confirming miracles, and what happened in the body of Hezekiah, was **a matter of time**. A confirming miracle was **instantaneous**. For example, Jesus said to the paralytic, *“Arise, take up your bed and go to your house”* (Mt 9:6). And he did so immediately.

**But the “miracle” of God working in the body of Hezekiah occurred over a period of time.** He did not immediately jump out of bed. Nevertheless, Hezekiah believed that he was healed because of his faith in God. But when the unbelievers encountered the healed paralytic, they immediately perceived through sight that he was healed immediately. They, as unbelievers, could not deny this confirming miracle of Jesus (See At 4:16).

In the context of Hezekiah’s “healing,” we must not forget that **Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus** (2 Tm 4:20). Either Paul could not heal this brother, or the time of confirming miracles had long passed. Or, it may have been that Paul simply prayed for his healing and then went on his journey. We would assume the latter, and thus Paul prayed that Trophimus be restored from his physical affliction. But this healing took time, for indeed Trophimus was still alive when Paul wrote the 2 Timothy letter much later. So Paul’s prayer for Trophimus did result in this brother being raised up.

We must also remember Timothy who had some affliction of the stomach. Timothy was not exhorted to pray for his stomach problem, and other physical afflictions that he experienced, but to **“use a little wine for your stomach’s sake, and your fre-**

**quent infirmities”** (1 Tm 5:23). Evidently there were other infirmities than the stomach problems that Timothy suffered. In this suggestion on the part of Paul, however, Paul urged Timothy to resort to the medicinal remedies of wine, and not prayer, though we assume that Paul did indeed pray for Timothy’s physical afflictions. We would conclude from this incident, however, that when there is a medical cure for an affliction, one should go see a doctor.

And then there was the case of Epaphroditus (Ph 2:25-27). This Philippian brother was sent to be with Paul in prison. While in Rome, he too became very ill. He was so ill when he was with Paul that he almost died. This was a physical affliction that took place over a period of time because news of his sickness was able to reach back home to Philippi, where the saints in Philippi evidently joined with Paul in prayers for him. Paul did not miraculously heal him. Only through the prayers of the saints in Philippi, with Paul’s prayers, he was raised up. God worked “miraculously” in this case in order to do as He did with Hezekiah. It was not an instantaneous healing, but a healing over a period time. In answer to all their prayers, God spared his life on behalf of Paul, who was in prison at the time facing death (Ph 2:27).

We must not conclude this point

without referring to Paul who could not receive an answer for his own physical affliction. He recognized that God gave him “*a thorn in the flesh*” (2 Co 12:7). Paul confessed, “*For this thing I implored the Lord three times that it might depart from me*” (2 Co 12:8). But the mountain of the thorn did not go away. And because it did not, Paul concluded,

*Therefore, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Co 12:10).

## B. God provides the necessities for life.

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus explained those things that God does for those who have put their trust in Him. The emphasis in the context of Matthew 6 was on the fact that God will take care of those who care for Him.

*Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?* (Mt 6:30).

Jesus taught that we should pray for our daily bread (Mt 6:11). If we are to pray for such, **then certainly God is able to provide that for**

**which we make request in prayer.** God is able to work in the lives of those who trust in Him to provide the necessities of life.

## C. God opens doors for evangelism.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries*” (1 Co 16:9). When Paul came to the city of Troas he said that “*a door was opened to me by the Lord*” (2 Co 2:12; see At 19:8-10). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,

*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith* (2 Th 3:1,2).

We do not know how God opens these doors in order that the gospel be preached to the lost. However, the Holy Spirit here affirmed that God is the One who is to be given credit for opening the doors. Therefore, we must conclude that God can work in ways whereby opportunities can be made available for the preaching of the gospel to the lost. Because He does this, it is imperative that Christians continually pray that doors be opened for the preaching of the gos-

pel. Jesus thus exhorted His disciples, *“Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest”* (Mt 9:38).

#### D. God provides escapes from temptation.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape ...* (1 Co 10:13).

We do not profess to know how God makes the way of escape from some mountain of trial we must overcome. Our lack of knowledge concerning how God provides the escape, however, does not mean that He will not so work in our lives to help us make our way over, around or through mountains.

It may be that God provides the wisdom that is necessary in order to perceive the way of escape (See Js 1:5,6). Whatever He does, **we must believe that a way of escape is provided if we will ask for it, and then take the way of escape.** If we are to believe what the Holy Spirit is here saying through Paul, then we must assume that God works in our lives in

order to provide escapes.

#### E. God delivers from evil workers.

While in prison, Paul was confident that God would deliver him from evil works. He wrote to Timothy, *“And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom”* (2 Tm 4:18; see Pv 2:6,8,12,16; 2 Th 3:2; 2 Tm 3:11; 4:17).

Paul believed in the power of prayer. He believed that God the Spirit could and would deliver him from prison. He wrote to Philemon, *“But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you”* (Pl 22). Paul asked for the prayers of brethren for he had faith that God would work in the environment of his affairs in order to answer those prayers.

*Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us* (2 Co 1:9-11).

Peter also believed that *“the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the un-*

*just under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pt 2:9).*

These deliverances for which Paul and Peter prayed, and for which they asked the brethren to pray, were not deliverances as Peter was immediately delivered from prison by an angel in Jerusalem (At 12:1-11). These were the works of God behind the scene, and thus, they were not perceived through the senses, but through faith. The fact that the early saints prayed for deliverance, therefore, is evidence that God works in some ways that are beyond our sense perception. Nevertheless, it is a work of God the Spirit to bring about that which is good.

## **F. God raises up evangelists.**

Jesus commanded that we pray for more evangelists to go into the harvest. *“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mt 9:38).* In reference to his own life, Paul said, *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tm 1:12).*

If Jesus commanded us to pray for laborers to enter the harvest, then we must believe that in some way He can raise up the laborers. Paul was put into the ministry through the direct work of Jesus who appeared to

him on the Damascus road. However, God also works in ways to raise up laborers. We subsequently witness the rise of laborers, but we do not understand exactly how God has raised them up. For this reason, therefore, Christians must have faith and pray for more laborers for the harvest.

## **G. God works in order that the faith of Christians not fail.**

Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith not fail: *“But I have prayed for you [Peter], that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Lk 22:32; see Ps 125:3; 1 Co 10:13).*

We do not understand how God could keep Peter’s faith from failing. However, Jesus prayed for Peter, and since Jesus made the prayer, we would assume through faith that God was able to work according to the request of Jesus that Peter’s faith not fail. In answer to this prayer, Peter, though in a moment of fear denied the Lord, he later returned to be faithful unto death.

In the same manner, Epaphras prayed for the faithfulness of his Colossian brethren.

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bond-servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Cl 4:12).*

Since Epaphras prayed that the Colossian disciples would stand perfect and complete, then we would assume that in some way God could answer this prayer. God thus works in our lives in order that we stand perfect and complete. He works in order that our faith not fail. And thus it is our faith that moves us to trust in the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

## H. God works to aid the work of the saints.

God works for those who work for Him. Paul requested of the Christians in Rome,

*... that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints* (Rm 15:30-32).

As stated before, the Holy Spirit can work for the saints in order to deliver them from those who would work evil against them. In this request for the Roman Christians' prayers, Paul assumes that the Holy Spirit was able to make his service acceptable to the saints. In some way, therefore, God the Spirit works in order to make productive the labors of the saints.

## I. God works in order to direct

### the travels of evangelists.

Paul asked the Roman brethren to pray for him on his journey that it might be possible for him to come to Rome.

*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you* (Rm 1:9,10).

After the same manner, Paul prayed that it might be possible for him to be with the Thessalonian brethren. He wrote that he and other evangelists were "**praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith**" (1 Th 3:10). Since Paul prayed that in some way God the Spirit would make it possible for him to go to Rome and Thessalonica, then we would assume that He would fulfill this request.

According to Paul's journeys in Acts, God answered the prayer to go to Rome by taking him to Rome at the expense of the Roman government. He was in the custody of a Roman commander to be taken to Rome for trial. In this way, therefore, God answered the prayer to get him to Rome.

## **J. God protects the saints in times of trial.**

Solomon wrote, “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe*” (Pv 18:10). “*Whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe*” (Pv 29:25). Since God can make things safe for the saints, then we would not be wrong to pray for such. However, we must also realize that God does allow the saints to undergo great trials, sufferings and death. Paul strengthened the early disciples by teaching them that “*we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22).

It is through tribulation that characters are prepared for eternal dwelling. James wrote, “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience*” (Js 1:2,3). Therefore, it is necessary that Christians undergo trials in this life in order to be prepared for eternal dwelling in the presence of God (See 1 Pt 1:6,7). However, because God can make it safe for the saints, then the saints should pray for this work of God in their lives.

## **K. God changes adversity.**

Paul was confident that God could turn adversity into good things. He wrote to the Philippian disciples

concerning the trials he was having in Rome in reference to those who jealously spoke out against him while he was in prison (Ph 1:12-18). Concerning what had happened, he wrote, “*For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance **through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ***” (Ph 1:19). He knew that God could in some way turn the work of Satan against Satan, and thus work things together for good (Rm 8:28).

## **L. God works to bring forth fruit in order to glorify Jesus.**

In 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12 Paul wrote,

*Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul prayed that God bring results from all the goodness and the work of faith of the brethren in Thessalonica (See 1 Co 3:5,6; 1 Th 1:2-8). We would assume, therefore, that God works in the lives of Christians in order to bring forth fruit from their labors. Paul also prayed that the name

of Jesus be glorified in the work of the Thessalonians. Therefore, God works in order to glorify the name of Jesus through the fruits of the labors of Christians (See 1 Co 1:31; 1 Th 2:20).

We must emphasize again the fact that God works in answering prayer in the areas where the inspired writers prayed, and instructed that we should pray. God may not answer a prayer in the manner we think He should. He may not answer a prayer when we think He should. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to record the preceding requests and examples of prayer in this chapter in order to reassure the saints that God works in the lives of the saints. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that God works in these areas in order to work for the Christian. To say that God does not so work is to accuse the Spirit of misguiding the inspired writers into making futile prayers and asking for futile prayers to be made on the part of the saints.

We would also add as a practical application of God's work in answering the prayers of the saints that we cannot keep a ledger of the Holy Spirit's activities in answer to our prayers. His work cannot be computerized. Christians cannot produce a balance sheet on the work of the Spirit

in their lives. The mystery of how God brings about all things to work together for our good is His department. He simply reassures us that He does work and that He works on our behalf. Paul reassured us with these words: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose"* (Rm 8:28).

Sometimes we seek to do the work of God by carrying out our own plans and programs. We try to work through well-organized plans and programs in order to produce results over which we can take glory. Efforts are often held in check by detailed shepherding and lording over the flock. In all our planning, there is often no space left for God to work in our plans and programs simply because we have calculated every detail that is to be accomplished. Everything is neatly directed by supervisors who are designated to carry out a certain agenda that we have planned. In our structured organizations, God sometimes has a hard time getting on our agendas in order to work all things together for good. We plan, and then we ask God to bless our plans. Maybe this is in reverse order.

It is good that we plan and organize what we feel we want and can do in evangelism and benevolence. This is certainly what the early disciples did in Acts 6 in reference to

administering to the needs of widows. However, **we must not organize God out of our efforts to do His will.** If we work simply to carry out a plan on paper, then something is wrong. Organization is meant to channel God's work on our specific needs. Organization is not for the purpose of stimulating or mustering recruits into file in order to march according to the orders of those who are seeking to lord over the flock. We must never order God out of His work by ordering the saints into conformity of the wishes of man. If we do, then we become institutional in our thinking and behavior. The body ceases to be a Spirit-led organic body. We can plan our work, but we must be cautious about planning the Spirit out of our work.

There is a mystery about God's work that we do not pretend to understand. We worship a God whose ways are past finding out. We are not as logical and analytical as to submit God to "systematic theology," or reduce His work in our lives to a corporate spread sheet. All His work cannot be reduced to human intellect and planning. The reality of His work in our lives must be allowed to be perceived by faith. The work of Holy Spirit in the Christian life cannot always be determined through simple empirical evaluations. This is why it is so difficult for institutionalized or legalized disciples to allow room for

the work of the Holy Spirit among the members.

God the Spirit who is with us is a God whose workings cannot be reduced to all that we can understand on the agenda of a business meeting. Therefore, we dare not create a god in our own image of human logic and deduction. A god whose workings can be calculated through human reasoning is a god who is not worth following. Such a god is of human invention and certainly made impotent by the extent to which the human mind can conceive how he works. We serve no such god.

We can understand God's work by understanding His own explanation of how He works. And the parameters of how He works are revealed in the Bible.

We dare not affirm that God works beyond the limits that He places on Himself in the Bible. We dare not affirm that God would do for man those things that He has not promised or declared He will do. Neither would we assume that God will do less for us than what He has promised to do.

Therefore, we would not create a god after our own desires who would relieve us of our spiritual responsibility to trust in Him. A god that would condone the theology, "we-should-sin-that-grace-may-abound," is as dangerous to our eternal salva-

tion, as the god we believe cannot work beyond our power of human reason and perceptions. Both are false gods. Both will lead one astray from the one true God who is revealed through the Scriptures. Though our understanding of His marvelous rev-

elation always leaves something to be desired, we must put our trust in this God and the mystery of His wondrous workings. While He works on our behalf, we would not presume to understand all His working.

## Chapter 15

### MARGINALIZING GOSPEL POWER

The Holy Spirit maintains a special relationship with the Christian today that was not characteristic with God's people in general before the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. The Old Testament gives little information concerning the work of the Spirit among the Israelites. His work was primarily directed toward a special group of prophets who ministered the word of God to the people of Israel throughout their history. Today, however, the Spirit works among all believers. Though He does not work in a manner to directly change moral behavior, He still works for the benefit of the Christian in ways that are beyond our full understanding.

If one recognizes that the Spirit worked among the early disciples in the first century through the miraculous gifts, then he must be careful to rightly divide the word of God on this matter. Those statements in Scripture

that refer to the Spirit's work in the first century must be divided from those statements wherein it is affirmed that He continues to work today. After the passing of the miraculous gifts, and the completion of inspired Scriptures, the Spirit has changed His medium by which He continues to work.

In the absence of the inspired written New Testament for about three decades after the establishment of the church, the Spirit worked miraculously through the gifts in order to aid the disciples in evangelism and church edification. Therefore, it is logical to assume that when we read New Testament passages that were directed to the early disciples who ministered with the miraculous gifts, we should be cautious to first understand those passages in the historical context in which they were first written. **We cannot make every passage in the New Testament concerning the work of the Holy Spirit applicable**

## to our situation today.

If we do not honor this principle of biblical interpretation, then we will rob the first century disciples of the Spirit's ministry to establish them in the faith through the gifts. We will also marginalize the work of the Spirit through His ministry of the inspired New Testament that came later. Our misapplication of these scriptures would also lead to many misunderstandings of the Spirit's work today.

It is our principle hermeneutic to approach all scriptures concerning the subject of the Holy Spirit by first interpreting them in their historical context. Doing this does not make the New Testament a dead letter today. It is simply an effort to follow Paul's directive to rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tm 2:15).

We correctly follow this biblical hermeneutic in understanding the application of the letter of Revelation. If we seek to apply every principle and historical statement of Revelation to our historical situation today, then we will miss a correct understanding of the message of the book. For example, if we can rightly apply the message of Revelation to the historical setting of persecuted Christians who lived until the fall of the Roman Empire, then we can understand what John was writing. If we follow the same principle in studying those passages that refer to the Holy Spirit, then

we can rightly apply passages concerning the Holy Spirit first to their historical setting of the Spirit's ministry through the miraculous gifts before the writing of the New Testament documents. We can then apply what the Spirit wants us to apply to ourselves today.

If this principle of interpretation assumes that the word of God (the New Testament) is weak in changing the moral behavior of the Christian, then we are asking for more than what God promised concerning the ministry of the Spirit on the heart of man. And if we ask for more than what God promised, then we are in a dangerous predicament of doing what Peter said of some in 2 Peter 3:16 concerning the twisting of difficult passages in Paul's writings. He wrote that some "*who are untaught and unstable twist [the teachings of Paul] to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*" We would have to admit that there are millions among the religions of the world today who do not know their Bibles. We would assume, therefore, that there is a great deal of scripture twisting on the subject of the Holy Spirit.

It is incumbent upon us to **study** the subject of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the Christian today. However, we must also **correctly apply** what we learn. There are statements made in the New Testament in

reference to the Holy Spirit that simply do not apply to us today. If we fail to understand this, we will never come to a knowledge of the truth on the matter of the Holy Spirit.

We have discovered that many who are excited about their beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit have little knowledge of the Bible on the subject. In fact, the knowledge of the Scriptures is so weak among some that they have turned to experiential religiosity in order to validate their faith. This is a particular problem in reference to understanding the power that the gospel should have on our lives as Christians. If one does not understand the gospel of God's grace, then he will often seek other ways by which to validate his faith. Those who do not understand the power of the gospel will often turn to other means by which they can grow in faith. If one fails to walk in gratitude of the gospel of grace, then he or she will invent all sorts of religious rites, rituals and experiential behavior by which to validate his or her faith.

In the religious world today, this validation of faith often comes from a mesmerizing experience at a concert assembly of excited religionists. Sometimes in this assembly of religionists, people are moved into a frenzy of "speaking in tongues," and thus their faith is validated by this experience, which experience is

claimed to be from the Holy Spirit. They assume that the Holy Spirit has taken control and people are "slain in the Spirit." "Miracles" are "performed" and the attendees are convinced that the Holy Spirit has taken control of those who have lost control. All this is performed by those who do not understand the motivating power of the gospel.

In all the excitement of the moment, those who validate their faith through such religious behavior have missed one very important point that validates true Christian faith. Jesus mentioned this point in John 16:14. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came after He ascended into heaven, **the Spirit would glorify Him**. Faith, therefore, that is validated by anything other than the gospel of Jesus, is a misguided faith. All that the Spirit did and would do must bring glory to Jesus. Our faith, therefore, must be validated by the gospel of Jesus.

If we find ourselves gravitating away from the gospel in order to focus on the Holy Spirit, then we can be assured that this is not the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit to lead us to Jesus Christ and His gospel reign, not to lead people to His own work on earth.

We must never underestimate the intimidation of a religiously misguided world of religions that has been carried astray by experiential su-

perstitutions. It is always the tendency of the individual to succumb to the religious environment around him in an effort to be religiously accepted. When everybody is believing and practicing a certain behavioral principle, it is difficult for one to stand alone against what he feels is biblically not correct. Nevertheless, in a world of misguided religiosity, it is the word of God that offers the only sure foundation upon which we must build our faith.

We live in a world wherein the charismatic movement has claimed a vast majority of those who are in the bondage of religion. Brethren who live in areas where this movement has great influence are often intimidated into conforming to the beliefs and behavior that is prevalent in these religious groups. However, we must warn ourselves not to be led astray by that which we cannot define in the word of God. Our minds must be captivated by God's word to the point that every belief and behavior of man is brought under the subjection and judgment of the Scriptures.

The following statement illustrates the challenge that gospel living disciples must face in this generation:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures teach that in order to be saved, we must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a

holy disposition to the mind, and is effected in a manner above our comprehension, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel, and that its proper evidence is found in the holy fruits we bring forth to the glory to God.<sup>24:9</sup>

When examined closely, this statement is not true, though it may appear harmless on the surface. It does not convey a biblical concept of the work of the Spirit in either conversion or the life of the Christian.

We must always question the supposed work of the Spirit outside the power of the gospel in the conversion of unbelievers. In the conversion of the unbeliever, the Spirit need not subsidize the power of the gospel. If He does, then the power of the gospel is questioned. Therefore, in any understanding of the conversion of the alien sinner, we must not bring into question the power of the incarnate Son of God on the cross and His resurrection to reign over all things, to be powerless in reference to the conversion of the sinner. It was the preaching of this gospel message that first cut to the heart of about three thousand people in Acts 2 (See At 2:22-36). The Holy Spirit did not have to activate the gospel message on Pentecost. He simply communicated the message through words,

which words, when preached, touched the hearts of thousands. The gospel has that same power today.

We can continue this point into the life of the gospel obedient believer. There are some who deny the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the sinner, but maintain the belief that the Spirit directly affects the moral behavior of man after conversion. The only difference between the two positions as to when the Spirit directly affects and controls the moral behavior of man is when each operation occurs. But consider what Paul wrote in Romans 1:13-16 concerning the continued power of the gospel in the lives of those who have obeyed the gospel:

*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you. But I was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you [brethren] also, even as I have among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you [brethren] also who are in Rome.*

After obedience to the gospel, the gospel does not cease to work on our hearts. In the preceding statement, Paul wanted to continue to preach the

gospel, but his audience were believers, not unbelievers. He wanted to have “gospel fruit” among the Christians in Rome. The gospel is preached, therefore, to convert the unbelievers, but also to produce fruit in the lives of the believers.

It is the power of the gospel, therefore, that continues to inspire spiritual growth as we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the gospel of Jesus (See 2 Pt 3:18). After being raised up from the waters of baptism in our obedience to the gospel, we must continue to focus on those things that are above, and thus put off the ways of the world (See Cl 3:1ff).

The supposed mysterious and direct work of the Spirit in the conversion of the sinner is a belief that attacks the justice of God. It is a belief that would nullify the power of the gospel in the conversion process. It would deprive man of his free-moral agency and place the blame on the Spirit for those who do not respond to the power of the gospel.

All these matters make God a respecter of persons. This teaching would even lead to the discouragement of those who could not feel a nudge or awakening in response to the Spirit’s supposed direct calling. Some have thus turned away from faith because they could not find solutions to the problems of their frustrated lives.

Those religious practitioners who promote the direct operation of the Spirit in the conversion of the sinner, are demanding more than what God has promised. They are frustrating people by leading them to believe that one must have some emotional conversion experience that is directed by the Holy Spirit.

But we must also consider that if there is a direct influence of the Spirit on the heart of man after obedience to the gospel, then the power of the gospel is minimized in the spiritual growth of the Christian. Those who promote an expectation on the part of the Spirit to directly change them after obedience to the gospel are discouraged when they do not find peace of mind and a life change that they so desire. Being therefore frustrated “with the Spirit,” they some-

times turn from God altogether.

They sometimes blame the Spirit for not changing their lives enough to guarantee faithfulness. They blame God for the suffering and heartaches in their lives that He supposedly is to relieve through the direct work of the Spirit. They blame God for all their problems when they should be blaming Satan. This “pointing the finger at God” is derived from a misunderstanding of who is responsible for the suffering in our lives and who is responsible for all evil. Satan is to be blamed for evil and the suffering. We must keep in mind that the more one blames God for the problems he is enduring in his life, the more he blames the Holy Spirit for not doing what he believes the Spirit is supposedly to do in his life.

## Chapter 16

### CONTINUING GOSPEL POWER

The entire chapter of Colossians 3 would be the introductory commentary on any study of living the sanctified life. Paul began that chapter with the statement, “*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above*” (Cl 3:1). The responsibility for doing all that he instructed in Colossians depends on two things: (1) One has been raised with Christ from the waters of baptism, (2) One

must take ownership of his own spiritual growth, and thus, separate (sanctify) himself from that which is of this world.

We must notice how Paul portrayed the separation of one from the ways of the world. He first instructed the baptized disciple, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Cl 3:2). In doing this, one must take the initiative to “*put to*

death your members that are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire” etc. (Cl 3:5). **This is the responsibility of the believer,** not the Holy Spirit. It is the responsibility of the believer to “*put off*” the ways in which “*you also once walked when you lived in them*” (Cl 3:7).

Once one takes the initiative to put off the ways of the old man, then it is time to “*put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him*” (Cl 3:10). Throughout Colossians 3 Paul instructs through the written letter of Colossians what the disciples must put off and put on. Nowhere in the entire chapter does he assign any transformation of gospel living to the Holy Spirit. We must assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit, through the inspired hand of Paul, was giving the instructions of what Christians must do for themselves in removing mountains in their lives. If they fail to “put off” and “put on,” then it is not the fault of the Holy Spirit. Christians are to sanctify themselves from the ways of the world. This is their responsibility as gospel-obedient disciples.

Sanctification is both a **onetime** washing of sin that occurs when one obeys the gospel in baptism, and also a **continuing** process that carries on throughout the believer’s life. The sanctification that takes place at the point of baptism is the result of the

cleansing power of the blood of Jesus at the cross. The sanctification (setting apart) that continues from the time one is raised with Christ from baptism, is our personal responsibility to set ourselves apart from the ways of the world by following the instructions of inspired Scripture as Colossians 3. Therefore, one is set apart and cleansed of sin at baptism by the blood of Jesus. But from that point, the continued setting apart of one’s behavior from the ways of the world is the responsibility of each Christian. Therefore, when one fails at any time in this daily walk to separate himself from the world, the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse one of sin (See 1 Jn 1:7).

Therefore, sanctification in the New Testament has two different, but related meanings. First, the word is used to refer to something that is **set apart for a holy purpose**. For example, under the Sinai law the Sabbath day was sanctified, that is set apart (Gn 2:3; Ex 31:13; Dt 5:12; Ez 20:10-12). Jesus was also sanctified, or set apart as a sacrifice for our sins (Jn 10:36; 17:19). In reference to the Christian’s life, sanctification refers to **one setting himself or herself apart from the world**.

Another use of the word “sanctification” is in reference to sin. We are cleansed (sanctified) of all sin by the blood of Jesus. When one obeys

the gospel in baptism, all sin is washed away (At 22:16). In baptism, one has remission of all sin (At 2:38). Sanctification of sin and sanctification of life begin at the same time. When one makes a commitment to obey the gospel in order to be sanctified of all sin, his or her repentance indicates a commitment to die to the world (See Rm 6:3-6). Dying to the world means that one takes the personal initiative to set himself free from the ways of the world. Jesus has control over our sanctification in reference to our sin problem. However, we have responsibility of our life-style to put off the ways of the world.

Because of the tremendous influence of Calvinism in the religious world today, the doctrine of the direct work of the Spirit to supposedly activate or renew the moral behavior of the Christian has become an accepted belief by many. One of the negative results of Calvinism is that one is relieved of his personal responsibility to take ownership for how he behaves in reference to his salvation.

John Calvin taught that once one was saved, he was always saved. In order to transform in Christian behavior, therefore, Calvin taught that the Spirit had to operate directly on the soul of man in order that change in moral behavior might be realized. Since one was supposedly inclined to do evil, the Holy Spirit had to be sum-

moned to aid the Christian to respond to the instructions of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. It was assumed that the individual disciple could not of one's own volition, "put off" the world and "put on" that which was right.

There are some important problems with this theology, which problems must be discussed in the context of the power of the gospel to lead one to Jesus, as well as its continuing power to develop the sanctified life through gospel living.

#### A. **Sanctification in conversion:**

When the believer's sins are washed away in the waters of baptism, he is sanctified by the blood of Jesus. This is expressed in the New Testament by the use of the **aorist tense**. This Greek verb tense emphasizes a **onetime action** that has occurred in the past. Notice how Paul used this verb tense in 1 Corinthians 6:11 in reference to the Corinthians' sanctification at the time of their obedience to the gospel: "*But you were **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*"

The Corinthians' sanctification from sin occurred at a point in time in the past. It was completed upon their obedience to the gospel. The same aorist tense concerning sancti-

fication was also used in reference to the apostate of Hebrews 10:29. The apostate individual “*counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing*” (See Hb 13:12).

Through the blood of Jesus, sanctification is accomplished “*by the Spirit of our God.*” Therefore, the blood of Jesus cleanses the sinner of all sin at the time one comes into contact with the blood of Jesus, which is at the time of one’s obedience to the gospel in baptism (Ep 1:7; Hb 13:12; 1 Jn 1:7). This onetime sanctification at the time of obedience to the gospel is complete. Paul explained that the Spirit through His word of instruction sanctifies the church. Jesus gave Himself for the church “*that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water [baptism] by the word*” (Ep 5:26). We now know this because of the inspired word by which this fact is communicated to us.

Is it the Spirit’s work to “apply” the blood of Jesus? Is it the Spirit’s work to make the soul of man “approachable” to God because of the blood of Jesus? The answer to these questions is not totally in our realm of understanding because this sanctification of the soul of man takes place in the spiritual realm. It is the blood of Jesus that makes forgiveness possible (1 Jn 1:7). It would be the work

of the Spirit to apply the blood in a manner to make the soul of man approachable to the Father. Whatever the case is here, this is certainly something that takes place in the spiritual realm, and at the time we obeyed the gospel.

**We know that these things take place simply because the Holy Spirit, through the New Testament, states that they take place.** Our knowledge of this sanctification, therefore, comes only through the Scriptures. The gospel of our forgiveness of sins is beyond the cross. The crucifixion of Jesus was the manifestation on earth of the gospel of forgiveness that was offered from heaven. We would have no idea of these things taking place in the relationship between the converted and the Creator if it were not for the Scriptures. Boles wrote,

The power of the Holy Spirit, both in conversion and sanctification, is so blended with the force of the word of God that no intelligent mind can separate them. No one can logically express an article of faith that does not come through the word of God. The Holy Spirit and the word of God are inseparable.<sup>2:192</sup>

Sanctification of our souls with God in heaven results from our obedience to the gospel on earth. Jesus

said, “*Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me*” (Jn 6:45). **Through hearing and learning the gospel that is revealed in the New Testament, men and women are brought to repentance.** They are brought to submission through the word of God. In obedience to the gospel, sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb (At 22:16). There is nothing mysterious about this. There would be mystery on our part only in understanding what takes place in the spiritual realm with the soul’s cleansing by the blood of Jesus through the Spirit in relation to God. However, this has nothing to do on the part of man in reference to his salvation. This has nothing to do with an individual changing his attitude and behavior in order to walk according to the gospel. But it has everything to do with one’s choice to obey the gospel. It has everything to do with making a choice to live in response to the gospel. Through the word of God, the Spirit reveals that our sins are forgiven upon our obedience to the gospel. This knowledge inspires us to walk in gratitude of the grace of God.

Forgiveness is God’s part in our salvation. But we must not forget that God’s part is dependent on our part to make a choice to obey the gospel. The Holy Spirit stays out of our part, lest we blame Him for not respecting

us as individuals to move our hearts to respond to the message of the gospel. It was in this area of thinking that John Calvin went wrong. He believed that our response, and God’s remission, were all dependent on whether the Holy Spirit showed respect for those He assumed God had predestined to eternal life.

Sanctification by the blood of Jesus at the point of obedience to the gospel is the work of God the Holy Spirit. However, sanctification occurs when the alien sinner voluntarily makes a free-moral decision to obey the gospel that has been communicated to him through the word of God. Upon obedience to the gospel, one is separated from sin by the blood of Jesus. However, one is separated from the ways of the world through a personal obedience to the instructions of the Holy Spirit in the word of God (See CI 3).

One can learn the gospel and how to obey the truth of the gospel without having the Spirit. Knowledge of and obedience to the gospel does not mean that the Spirit indwells the alien sinner before he or she is baptized. In a similar manner, the sinner can memorize all passages in the New Testament concerning God’s directions for moral behavior, and yet, not respond to the gospel. The Spirit simply does not indwell the one who has not submitted to the gospel by immer-

sion. Therefore, at the point of conversion in baptism, one comes into a spiritual relationship with God that did not exist before his conversion. This relationship comes as a result of one's submission to the will of God in his life. If one does not respond to the gospel, it is not the fault of the Holy Spirit.

We must also remember that the sinner is cut to the heart when he or she **hears** and **understands** the kingdom reign of Jesus. Acts 2:37 still reads, "*Now when they **heard** this, they were **cut to the heart**.*" If one can be cut to the heart without the aid of the Holy Spirit before baptism, then certainly the same can happen after baptism. Through words, Peter communicated the gospel reign of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. This is the message the people heard. That same power of the gospel reign of Jesus continues even to this day. Therefore, when we as baptized disciples speak of the gospel reign of Jesus today, we ourselves continue to be cut to the heart.

## **B. Sanctification in Christian living:**

The obedient believer is sanctified, or cleansed of sins, at the time of baptism. This is a onetime happening expressed by the aorist tense of Greek verbs. However, there is a

continual sanctification that takes place in the Christian's life that is often expressed by use of the **perfect tense** of the Greek verbs. **This tense expresses something that happened in the past, but the results of that happening continue unto the present.**

Paul wrote in order to urge the Thessalonians to continue walking in their sanctification that they had received when they obeyed the gospel. He wrote,

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: **that you** should abstain from sexual immorality; **that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel** in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God ... (See 1 Th 4:2-7).*

To the Corinthians, he also wrote, "*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who **are sanctified** [perfect tense] ...*" (1 Co 1:2). Both the Corinthian and Thessalonian Christians were sanctified of sin at the time of their obedience to the gospel. However, Paul placed the responsibility directly on their shoulders to continue in their sanctification by walking in obedience to the **inspired instructions of God**. This is what Paul instructed Timothy,

*Therefore, if anyone cleanses [sanctifies] himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified [perfect tense] and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work (2 Tm 2:21).*

Jesus affirmed this continued appreciation for one's sanctification by walking in the gospel. Jesus Himself was sanctified, or set apart in order that His disciples "may be sanctified [perfect tense] by the truth [of the gospel]" (Jn 17:19).

By use of the perfect tense, therefore, sanctification started at one time in the past, but had continuing results in the present. This use of the word "sanctification" in relation to the perfect tense, therefore, indicates that this is the Christian's efforts to continually manifest his appreciation for being cleansed of sin by separating himself from the ways of the world. As one grows in keeping himself from the world, he continues to be one who is set apart from the world. In other words, when one takes the initiative to obey the gospel, he has committed himself to live by the gospel the rest of his life. This means putting off the ways of the world and putting on the ways that are explained by the Spirit in the word of God.

Being set apart from the world in the Christian life began at conversion. This sanctification continues

through one's obedient response to the gospel by which he was saved. Hebrews 2:11 states, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified [perfect tense] are all of one" (See also At 20:32; 26:18; Rm 15:16; Hb 10:10,14 where the perfect tense is used in reference to sanctification).

Hebrews 10:14 states, "For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Through His blood offering at the cross, Jesus sanctified those who set their lives on a course to be separated from the world. In the context of Hebrews 10:14, the sanctification was made possible through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. Hebrews 10:10 states, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

We must conclude by stating that 1 Corinthians 6:11 teaches that there is a onetime sanctification that occurred at the time of one's baptism. This is in reference to sin. But at the same time, one's commitment to live the sanctified life in one's continued response to the gospel must carry on throughout one's life. Paul referred to the once and for all time blood sanctification in Ephesians 5:26: Jesus give Himself on the cross "that He might sanctify and cleanse it [the church] with the washing of water by the word." This is our motivation

that explains how we live in response to the gospel that we have obeyed.

There is, therefore, a progressive sanctification of life-style that begins after one obeys the gospel. This is in the transformation of the individual by his obedience to the instructions of God the Spirit. This transformation is guided by the inspired Scriptures. Notice how Paul in Ephesians 4:17-32 laid the responsibility for this continual sanctification on the shoulders of each Christian:

*... you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles ... you have not so learned Christ ... if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth [of the gospel] is in Jesus ... put off ... your former conduct ... be renewed in the spirit of your mind ... put on the new man ... putting away lying ... not give place to the devil ... let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ... do not grieve the Holy Spirit ... be kind ... forgiving ....*

God has communicated His instructions to us in order to direct our behavior. John wrote,

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of*

*the Son of God* (1 Jn 5:13).

### C. **The arrogance of self-sanctification:**

We understand that once we have been sanctified by the blood of Jesus that flows from the cross, that blood continues to cleanse us as we walk in the light of the gospel (Hb 13:12; 1 Jn 1:7). However, in our efforts to live the sanctified life in Christ, we have a tendency to marginalize this blood. We do so by not understanding that our walk in the light of the gospel can never be meritorious, that is, doing good works, or performing religious rites and rituals in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the blood of the offered Son of God. In other words, by meritorious conduct, we become religious, and religion is maintained by some system of meritorious performance of rites, rituals or ceremonies that identify a particular religion.

Therefore, we must be cautious in living the sanctified life, but specifically in our sanctification to set ourselves apart from the world. We must be cautious that we not lead ourselves into a religious behavior by which we would self-sanctify ourselves in reference to the cleansing blood of Jesus. In reference to this blood offering of the Son of God, *“this He did once for all when He of-*

*ferred up Himself*” (Hb 7:27). “*By His own blood He entered **once for all** into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption*” (Hb 9:12). “*By this will we **have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all***” (Hb 10:10).

We get the point. The offering of Jesus was complete and once for all time. This is the power of the gospel of His offering of Himself for us. His offering, therefore, need not be subsidized by our religious performances. We have been sanctified by His blood once and for all time. If

we seek to self-sanctify ourselves, or even subsidize His offering, then we have marginalized the cleansing blood of the Son of God that was poured out on the cross. We have subsequently denied the gospel. We are thus, as Paul wrote, preaching another gospel of self-justification through either good works or works of law (See Gl 1:6-9). If we would seek to self-justify ourselves before God, we would be as Paul wrote, “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by [perfect] law [keeping]. **You have fallen from grace***” (Gl 5:4).

## Chapter 17

### THE MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

Setting oneself apart from the world is a progressive work of life. The word “sanctification” means to “set apart.” This setting apart occurs in a moment of time at baptism when one submits his life to the lordship of Jesus. However, the continuation of the “setting apart” in the Christian’s growth in holiness is a lifetime project. One’s character is continually transformed throughout his life to conform to the nature and character of Jesus (See Rm 12:1,2). This spiritual growth is a process of continuing one’s separation from the mentality and practice of worldly

thinking and behavior. The more one is set apart from the world, in a sense, the more holy (sanctified) he becomes. This transformation is directed by the word of God and is regulated by the submissive will of the Christian to the will of God.

The following scriptures explain the sanctification of the saint that begins at the time of obedience to the gospel and continues throughout one’s life. Each statement of scripture identifies specific aspects of our sanctification in reference to our transformation into the image of Jesus.

## A. John 17:17:

Jesus said, “***Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.***” In the context of this statement, Jesus was speaking to the Father in prayer concerning the sanctification of His apostles. Their sanctification, or separation from the world would be produced by the medium of the truth of the gospel. Therefore, sanctification or holiness is produced in our response to the gospel. Obedience to the truth of the gospel first separates one from sin. When one has made a commitment to obey the gospel, he has also made a commitment to live according to the gospel.

The commentary on how this works in one’s life was revealed in Philippians 2:5-7:

*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men.*

This is incarnational living after the example of Jesus who came into this world in the flesh. When one allows the example of Jesus to permeate his or her behavior by living the gospel of the incarnational Son of God, then he or she is separated from the world.

Through incarnation, the Son separated Himself from God and heaven. When we live the incarnational life of the Son of God, we separate ourselves from the world in order to be reconnected with God and heaven.

In the John 17:17 statement, Jesus was not speaking of some mysterious sanctification that would come as a result of the disciples’ knowledge of the Bible. One does not sanctify his life through a knowledge of the Bible, though the Bible is the road map that one must follow in order to set himself apart from the world. Sanctification (being set apart) happens when one implements in his or her behavior the incarnational behavior of Jesus, the knowledge of which comes only from our knowledge of His incarnation, which incarnation is revealed in the word of God. Sanctification by the truth of the incarnational Son of God is the result of walking as Jesus walked in this world. John wrote of this life in Gaius: “*For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth [of the gospel] that is in you, just as you walk in the truth*” (3 Jn 3).

## B. Acts 15:9:

Peter stated in reference to the Gentiles that God “*made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*” The Greek

article is present in the phrase “by faith.” It should thus be translated, “by **the** faith.” The faith is the truth of the gospel of Jesus that has been revealed. Jude referred to the faith in this manner when he wrote,

*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith** [of the gospel] **which was once for all delivered to the saints** (Jd 3).*

Jude 3 and Acts 15:9 correspond perfectly with what Jesus said in John 17:17. Christians are sanctified and purified by their faith in the truth of the gospel, which is the faith that has once and for all time been delivered to the saints. This is precisely what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22: “*You have purified your souls in obeying the truth [of the gospel] through the Spirit.*” When one submits his life in obedience to the gospel, he separates himself from the world. In this way, it is the truth of the gospel that sets one apart from the world. One’s commitment to live in response to the gospel separates him from the world. One has thus chosen to live “in the Spirit” by following the directions of the Spirit that are revealed in the word of God.

## C. **Ephesians 5:26:**

In reference to the church as a whole, Paul wrote that “*He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water **by the word** [of the gospel].*” When one takes up the “*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*” he guards his life from unholiness by living according to the word of God (Ep 6:17).

Those who obey the gospel are initially purified (cleansed) of sin in the waters of baptism (At 22:16). Beyond this, however, the obedient voluntarily set themselves apart from the world in their commitment to live according to the truth of the gospel. The sinner sets himself apart from the world by submission to the truth of the gospel. As a Christian after baptism, he continually sets himself apart from the world as he strives to live the incarnational life of Jesus. In this sense, therefore, Jesus was saying in John 17:17 that we are sanctified by the truth of the gospel.

It is the Spirit who works through the revelation of the truth of the gospel to offer to the world the opportunity to obey the gospel (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:16). Those who accept the opportunity by obedience to the gospel, are cleansed of sin by the blood of Jesus (Ep 1:7). Through our incarnational walk to allow the mind of Christ

to be in us, it is the Spirit working through the truth of the gospel to transform our moral behavior into the image of Jesus. There is nothing mystical or mysterious about this work of the Spirit to lead us through the revealed truth of the gospel. Our transformation is accredited to the Holy Spirit simply because He is the One through whom the truth of the gospel is revealed to the world through the Scriptures (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

#### D. 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

*“Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you** completely.”* In this verse sanctification is **passive**, that is, God is doing the sanctifying of the individual. (The passive voice is also used in At 20:32; 26:18; 1 Co 1:2.)

The passive voice in this context does not refer to God subjecting the individual against one’s will or sanctifying without conditions. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter **commanded** that Christians are to sanctify Jesus in their hearts. They are commanded to set aside Jesus in their hearts. This is the same as Paul’s hortatory instruction to let the mind of Christ be in every disciple to live as Jesus lived (Ph 2:5). In order to harmonize the “passive” sanctification of God with the “commanded” sanctification of 1 Peter 3:15 by which Christians are to set apart

Jesus in their hearts, we would conclude that through the God-originated gospel the Christian voluntarily submits to divine instruction. He allows the mind of Christ to control his own mind.

When a submissive disciple allows the mind of Christ to be his mind in all things, God cleanses the inner man of sin. However, the obedient individual sets himself apart from the world by his voluntary obedience to the truth of the gospel. This is the sense of Jesus’ plea to the Father to sanctify the disciples in John 17:17: *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”*

God must be given the credit for this sanctification because He is the origin of the gospel of His Son. The individual is passive in the process of being sanctified in the inner man by God who gave His only begotten Son after whom we live. However, this sanctification by God cannot happen unless one submits to the truth of the gospel in order to separate himself from the world. It is this concept of sanctification that Paul revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:2-7 when he wrote, *“Each of you should know how to **possess his own vessel in sanctification**”* (1 Th 4:4). Paul then instructed the disciples in Thessalonica concerning those things from which they must abstain (See also 1 Tm 2:15; Hb 12:15). Therefore, God expects us to be sanc-

tified by the truth of the gospel in the sense that we should voluntarily live in response to that which has come to us through the inspired word of the Holy Spirit.

### E. 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

Paul wrote, “*God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*” The *American Standard Version* reads, “... *sanctification of the Spirit.*” However, it must be noted that the article “the” is not in the Greek text here, nor is the capitalization of the word “spirit.” This is where the translator’s interpretation, and theology, often plays a part in the rendition of passages as this.

When we remove the article, the reading would be, “*sanctification of Spirit.*” Again, the word “spirit” is capitalized only because the translator might think that reference is to the Holy Spirit. But this is only the opinion of the translator. If we removed the capitalization, the passage would read, “*sanctification of spirit.*” Reference in the passage, therefore, would be to the sanctification **of the human spirit**. This is in complete harmony with John 17:17 and Acts 15:9. This meaning is assumed by the *International King James Version* which reads, “*God has from the beginning chosen you for salvation*

*through sanctification of spirit and belief in the truth* [of the gospel].” Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 makes more sense with this rendition because reference is to the sanctification of the spirit of man in reference to his salvation. This places the responsibility on the individual disciple to separate himself from the ways of the world.

The Greek word *eis* in the text of 2 Thessalonians 2:13 is actually used in the prepositional phrase “**for** salvation.” This preposition would more accurately be translated according to its most common rendition, “into” or “unto.” The Thessalonians were thus chosen **unto** salvation. Not only were they chosen unto salvation in Christ, they were also striving unto the eternal salvation that is yet to be revealed. A parallel passage would be Romans 13:11 where Paul said that “*our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*”

2 Thessalonians 2:14 states that the Thessalonians were called through **the gospel**. They were called unto the glorious salvation of heaven through the truth of the gospel, by which they sanctified or purified their spiritual nature in their obedience to the gospel. This is what Jesus was stating in John 17:17: “*Sanctify them in truth.*” This is also what Peter stated in 1 Peter 1:22: “*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth* [of

the gospel] ***through the Spirit.***" 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 and 1 Peter 1:22 are parallel passages. Both Paul and Peter were revealing sanctification, or purification of the soul or spirit of man, through obedience to the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 points to a time when God chose (aorist tense) the Thessalonian Christians unto (*eis*) salvation. The Greek word *eis* refers us to that unto which they were chosen. The Christian is thus striving toward eternal salvation. 2 Thessalonians 2:14 identifies heaven as the salvation to which Christians strive. Therefore, Paul explains in this passage that the Thessalonians responded to the gospel, and were immersed for the remission of sins (a onetime event), because they aspired unto the eternal heaven to come.

By continually striving in their lives to live in response to the gospel, they moved toward their heavenly reward. In this one passage, therefore, mention is made of the onetime sanctification of the Christian (in obedience to the gospel), and the progressive sanctification (maturing growth) of the Christian in living in response to the gospel.

#### **F. 1 Timothy 4:4,5:**

Paul wrote, "*For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be*

*refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*" This passage teaches the "setting apart" of something by the word of God. Paul says that all foods should be received with thanksgiving, for every creature "*is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*"

One would not contend that in the preceding statement Paul was referring to making creatures holy. The teaching here must surely be that the word of God **teaches** that all creatures are accepted by God to be eaten. However, since the phrase "*sanctified by the word*" is used here in reference to the sanctification of creatures, we could also assume that the same concept of setting apart is used elsewhere. It is used to refer to our sanctification by the word of God as we strive to live the gospel according to the Spirit's instructions in the word of God. In this way we are "*sanctified by the word of God.*"

The obedient are sanctified because God, through His word, proclaims them to be sanctified. When one fulfills the conditions for coming into a covenant relationship with God, God through the Spirit-inspired word proclaims that one is sanctified. This is at least the teaching of John 17:17. This is also Paul's meaning in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

It is correct to say that Christians

are sanctified by the word of God in the sense that the word of God gives instructions as to how one is to separate himself from the way of the world (See Cl 3). Once one submits to the word of God, and the conditions for salvation, then the word proclaims that one is sanctified.

The subject of sanctification encompasses several things in our relationship with God. In the spiritual realm, we are first sanctified by the blood of Jesus when we obey the gospel. As a result of our baptism into Christ, we come into a covenant rela-

tionship with God. We are then directed by the word of God to separate (sanctify) ourselves from the world. Sanctification is a continuing process in our efforts to live separate from the world. As we walk in the light of the truth of the gospel, we must remember that we are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). As we submit to the instructions of the word of God in response to the gospel, we continually sanctify ourselves from the ways of the world because we are grateful to God for our salvation that we have in Christ.

## Chapter 18

### STRENGTHENING BY THE SPIRIT

Paul wrote that God will not allow us to be “*tempted beyond*” what we are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). There are two interpretations that one may derive from what Paul meant in this statement. The first is whether God directly works on the heart of the Christian to prevent one from being tempted beyond what one can personally resist.

The second is whether God works in the environment in which we live in order to guard us from any situation that would test us beyond what we can endure. This second understanding is probably the most common belief. We believe that God

works in the environment of the Christian to guard him from being tempted beyond what he is able to endure. In this way the free-moral agency of man is protected. This position also does not force us into making God a respecter of persons. In other words, the apostate Christian cannot accuse the Holy Spirit of not making him strong enough inwardly to overcome temptation. Also, this second understanding does not leave room for us to complain against God when times get tough.

However, in view of the second interpretation, we must not dismiss the personal strengthening by the

Holy Spirit. If we say that the Spirit works directly on the heart of the Christian in a way to strengthen him from falling, however, we must be prepared to first wonder how He so works without subjectively controlling the emotional behavior of the Christian. In the following statement, Robert Milligan recognized our inability to explain this special strengthening:

If it be asked **how** the Holy Spirit accomplishes all this [comforting, strengthening, etc.] in our hearts, we must, I think, again confess our ignorance, and humbly acknowledge our inability to answer the question.<sup>22:281</sup>

If the Spirit does work directly in the area of strengthening, Milligan is correct concerning our understanding as to how the Spirit works to accomplish such in the heart of the Christian. Nevertheless, Milligan reaffirmed his position by stating,

It seems probable moreover that the Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of the saints directly, or at least by ways and means unknown to us, in order to strengthen our infirmities, and cause the word of truth to become more productive in fruits of holiness.<sup>22:282</sup>

Milligan's statements represent the belief of many in discussions concerning the strengthening of the Spirit. Though it cannot be understood how the Spirit works to comfort and strengthen, He works. We need not understand how the Spirit works in order to understand that He works in order to bring special comfort and strength to our hearts in times of need.

If the Spirit operates directly on the heart in strengthening the Christian, then we must also be prepared to answer the following question: **Why are some overcome by temptation, and subsequently, fall from the faith?** The possibility of apostasy is a reality. People do fall from the faith because they lose heart. They are overcome by temptation. If the Spirit works directly on the heart of the Christian in the area of strengthening, then we would wonder what responsibility the Spirit must assume if the Christian falls. Is the Spirit to be accused of failing the Christian? Is He to be held accountable for the eternal loss of any apostate Christian? These are questions that we must consider in developing our understanding of the strengthening of the Christian by the Spirit.

The work of the Spirit to strengthen the Christian, either apart from or in conjunction with the Scriptures, is a work beyond our compre-

hension. We are not in the position to understand or deny this work. However, whatever one's thinking might be on the subject, he must take into consideration the arguments that present themselves by the apostate Christian who falls because of a lack of strength. In affirming any belief, one must seek not to infringe on or contradict fundamental truths. We must always bring to our attention fundamental truths in relation to any teaching concerning the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. These fundamental truths must form our understanding of the work of the Spirit in those areas where there is little revelation or little understanding on our part.

We may not understand all that transpires when God makes it possible that we are not tempted above that which we are able to endure. However, because of the Scriptures, we at least can prove that the Spirit works on us through the medium of the Holy Scriptures. Consider the following cases where the Spirit worked through the word of the gospel in order to build up and strengthen the disciples:

### A. The Ephesians were built up.

When Paul left the Ephesian church, he reminded the elders of their responsibility to focus on the word of God in order to grow spiritually: “*And now, brethren, I commend you to God*

*and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up*” (At 20:32). When he wrote to all the disciples in Ephesus a few years later, he commanded them to be strong: “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). Titus 2:11,12 would be a commentary passage on the work of the word of God in the lives of the Ephesians:

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.*

It is through the teaching of the word of God that we are spiritually built up. Through this same word, we are taught to deny ungodliness. We must give credit to the Holy Spirit for this spiritual growth simply because He is the source by which the word existed. It existed in the lives of the early disciples, either through the inspired message of the prophets, or later through the inspired written word of God.

**Ephesians 3:16** is a very important passage concerning the strengthening through the Spirit. Paul prayed, “*that He [God the Father] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might [power] through His Spirit in*

**the inner man**” (See 1 Pt 5:10). We must understand this statement in the **historical context** in which it was originally written. The preposition “with,” in reference to power, emphasizes the instrumental use of power. This power is exercised “in the inner man,” thus, this phrase would be locative. **The passage would therefore be saying that one is strengthened in the inner man [location] by the power of the Holy Spirit.** If reference is here to the use of the miraculous gifts in the lives of the Ephesian disciples at the time the statement was made, then the Ephesians would have received strength from the confirming nature of the miraculous gifts, as well as the inspired message of the Ephesian prophets. However, the strengthening seems to go beyond their witness of the ministry of the gifts. They were ministered the word of God through the gifted prophets among them.

Another important grammatical point concerning Ephesians 3:16 would be the preposition “through.” Some translations unfortunately translate the Greek *dia* that is used here with the English preposition “by.” The *New King James Version* is correct with the translation “through.” It is the same preposition that was used by Peter in 1 Peter 1:22: “*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through [dia] the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren.*”

The Spirit does not work directly in conversion to purify the souls of man. He works **through the message of the truth of the gospel.** Through the Spirit-inspired truth of the gospel, the Spirit works in conversion. 1 Peter 1:22 would be parallel to the thoughts of Ephesians 3:16. **Through the miraculous power of the inspired preaching of the truth of the gospel to the Ephesians, they were strengthened in the inner man.**

Paul does not explain in Ephesians 3:16 **how** the Spirit strengthens. However, we would assume that He at least strengthens through the medium of the message of the gospel. The Ephesians were to allow the Spirit’s power through the preaching of the gospel to strengthen them. Paul’s emphasis on accepting this power is explained in Ephesians 6:10-20 where the Ephesians were to take up the armor of salvation.

Ephesians 3:17 would agree with the preceding point. Paul continued to say “*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*” Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). Thus, Christ dwells in one insofar as the word of Christ produces faith in the inner man of the obedient believer. A commentary passage on this thought would be Romans 16:25:

***Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the***

**preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.

We are established (strengthened) according (by) the gospel. Paul added, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). Jesus does strengthen us. Through the power of the gospel He has laid the foundation upon which the Christian stands (1 Co 15:1,2). Through growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, He continues to strengthen those who have put their faith in Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). This thought is brought out in Paul’s introduction to the letter of Romans when he expressed the reason for his desire to go to Rome:

*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you. But I was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you also, even as I have among the other Gentiles* (Rm 1:13).

Paul then explained how he would produce this fruit among the Roman Christians: “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you [Christians] also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for the unbelievers, but it is also the power of God

to produce spiritual fruit (growth) in the hearts of the believers. This power does not terminate at the waters of baptism.

One must always consider verse 16 of Ephesians 3 with verse 20: “*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.*” God’s power of the gospel continues to work in the hearts of the Christian. This power was released through the preaching of the gospel in the first century. This same power continues today. The power of the gospel continues to work for the benefit of the Christian. The gospel of God’s grace that was revealed by His Son on the cross is the guarantee of God’s promise that His Son will come for us. This promise is based on God’s word:

*For 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* (Hb 4:12).

## **B. The Colossians were strengthened.**

Paul prayed that the Colossians “*be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual un-*

**derstanding**” (Cl 1:9). His prayer was that they ...

*... walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power**” (Cl 1:10,11).*

These are statements of exhortation. They were written in order to encourage the Colossian disciples to continue in the faith. Paul wrote in Colossians 2:6,7,

*As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, **so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.***

The Colossians had been taught the truth of the gospel. They were increasing in the knowledge of the word of the gospel because of the work of the inspired prophets who labored among them in teaching. The prophets continued to teach the gospel as the foundation upon which they would spiritually grow. Therefore, upon the foundation of the gospel, they were being established.

### **C. The Thessalonians were established and strengthened.**

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians,

***And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and toward all, even as we do toward you. May He establish** [strengthen] **your hearts to be blameless in holiness before our God** (1 Th 3:12,13).*

How did the Lord cause the Thessalonians to be established in their hearts? In the same chapter, Paul stated that He sent Timothy **“to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith”** (1 Th 3:2). In this case, it was through the teaching of the prophet Timothy that the Thessalonians were established and encouraged (See Gl 6:1,2). This would be the same medium of strengthening that Paul wanted to accomplish among the Roman Christians through the teaching of the gospel that all of them had already obeyed (Rm 1:13-16). 1 Thessalonians 2:13 is a commentary verse concerning this power of the word of the gospel to build up the Christian:

*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.***

The point is that because of the belief on the part of the Christian, the word of the gospel of God can permeate one's life and direct his ways. Through the power of this message, the Holy Spirit establishes and encourages Christians. Through the preaching of the Spirit-inspired word of the message of the gospel, the Spirit works in order to strengthen every disciple.

Through the revelation of the word of God, Christians study, and thus, are strengthened by what they learn from the faithfulness of others. They read of other faithful people of God who were delivered because of their faith in the promises of God (Hb 11). They were thus strengthened and encouraged as they reflected on the hope that was set before them. Christians are also strengthened by their companionship with one another.

They encourage one another to be faithful (Gl 6:1,2; Hb 10:24,25). They remain faithful because of their hope that is produced by focusing on the message of the gospel of God's grace through His Son.

Though Christians are strengthened indirectly by influences from outside, they are also strengthened by God's work in their inner person. We are not informed as to how God accomplishes this strengthening. We are simply told through the Scriptures that God the Spirit works to strengthen our resolve in times of trial. The disciples of Jesus find great encouragement in this promise. In times of trial, therefore, they rely on the inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit to take them through tough times. God will not allow His children to be tempted beyond what they can endure. And thus, He strengthens His children in times when they need endurance.

## Chapter 19

### COMFORTED BY THE SPIRIT

The entire spectrum of the gospel—the incarnation, atoning sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, coronation and kingdom reign—are all the result of the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Continual study and learning these subjects in the word of God brings tremendous com-

fort. When one is in Christ, therefore, his continual remembrance of such great news renews one's soul. For this reason, God expects personal Bible study of every Christian, for it is only through the word of God that we learn about the gospel. He will not, therefore, bring comfort to those who

refuse to “grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 3:18). He has thus commissioned the preaching and teaching of the message of the gospel as a source of encouragement for all Christians. The following points describe how God comforts those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus seek to live according to the gospel:

### A. God comforts through the influence of personalities.

Paul wrote,

*For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, **that their hearts may be encouraged**, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding (Cl 2:1,2).*

Paul indicated in the preceding statement that those in Laodicea, as well as those who heard of his labors, but had not seen his face, would be comforted **by him**. He labored “*that their hearts may be encouraged.*”

The disciples in Colosse were also comforted by the presence and teaching of Tychicus. Tychicus was sent to them by Paul in order “*that he may know your circumstances and **comfort your hearts***” (Cl 4:7,8). Paul

also sent Tychicus to the Ephesians “*that he may **comfort your hearts***” (Ep 6:22). Tychicus comforted the disciples by reminding them of the gospel of Jesus Christ (See Rm 1:13-16). He was the agent through whom God worked to comfort hearts. Concerning Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark and Justus, Paul said that all these were men “*proved to be a **comfort to me***” (Cl 4:7-11). Through the faithful work of fellow workers in the preaching of the gospel, God comforts the hearts.

### B. God comforts through the presence of fellow disciples.

Through the same medium as pointed out in the preceding point with the Colossians, the Thessalonians were encouraged. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he “*exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children*” (1 Th 2:11). When he left Thessalonica, he sent Timothy “*to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith*” (1 Th 3:2). When Paul heard of the Thessalonians’ faith, he was also comforted. “*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love ... we were **comforted concerning you by your faith***” (1 Th 3:6,7). It was through the good reports brought by fellow teachers of the

gospel that the Thessalonians were comforted. Paul was comforted by the reports of faithfulness of those who had obeyed the gospel. It was as John wrote, *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth”* (3 Jn 4).

Emphasis on individuals being the medium through whom God comforts is also revealed in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: *“Therefore **comfort each other** and edify one another, just as you are doing.”* *“Comfort the faint-hearted”* (1 Th 5:14). By revelation of things concerning the resurrection and kingdom reign of King Jesus over all things, Paul instructed the Thessalonians, *“Therefore **comfort one another with these words**”* (1 Th 4:18). In 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17, Paul wrote, *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ ... **comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.**”*

The comforting of the Thessalonians was through two means: First, it was through the medium of teachers who reminded them of the gospel that they had obeyed, as well as the good reports that they brought to the disciples. Secondly, it was through inspired teachers that Paul sent to them fellow workers in the faith. Through the medium of the presence of individuals who focused on the gospel in Thessalonica, Christians were comforted.

### C. **God comforts by providentially bringing Christians together.**

In 2 Corinthians 7:6,7 Paul wrote,

*Nevertheless God, **who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.***

In this passage, **credit was given to God for the comfort that came to everyone involved.** But the comforting was in the interaction of Christians with one another, which interaction was based on their common obedience to the gospel (Jd 3). Paul also explained the manner or medium through which one is comforted.

Paul was comforted by God in two ways. First, he was comforted by the coming of Titus. Titus' presence brought him comfort. Secondly, he was comforted by hearing of the tender affections the Corinthians had for him. He knew that the Corinthians had been concerned about his situation. When they were told of His well-being, they were also comforted. Paul wrote, *“Therefore we have been **comforted in your comfort**”* (2 Co 7:13).

The Corinthians' comfort of Paul **came from God**. However, it came through the person of Titus and the knowledge of the Corinthians' concern for his well-being. We could say that it was God's providential work that brought Titus to Paul. Therefore, in this way we must give God credit, as did Paul, that the comfort originated from God.

The above example may explain what Paul meant in the entire context of 2 Corinthians 7:3-7. He was "*filled with comfort*." He praised God "*who comforts the downcast*." He thanked Titus for the comfort that he brought. He rejoiced that Titus was comforted by the Corinthians.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Paul looked to the Father as the "*God of all comfort*" (2 Co 1:3), because God comforted him in his affliction. The 2 Corinthians 7:6,7 text explains how God comforted Paul. Because of this comfort from God, Paul said that Christians were able to comfort one another (2 Co 1:4). 2 Corinthians 7:6,7 is a commentary of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

#### **D. God comforts by working in the environment of our lives.**

After Saul's conversion, the early church had peace and was edified. "*And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,*

*they were multiplied*" (At 9:31). The early church was **comforted by the fact of Saul's conversion**. The lack of stress under persecution equals comfort. When Christians live in an environment where there is no persecution from either government or enemies of the truth, they can live in comfort.

The word which is translated "comfort" in Acts 9:31 is from the same Greek word that is used in John 14:16 where it is translated "helper," "counselor," or "comforter." This is a word that was commonly used as a legal term to refer to an advocate or legal counsel. However, in the context of Acts 9:31, the word refers to supplication or entreaty. Though this is the only time this word is used in Acts, in other scriptures it is translated either "exhortation," "consolation" or "entreaty." The word is also used in Romans 15:4 where Paul stated,

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

This passage teaches that the disciples were comforted (consoled) by the inspired Scriptures that were written beforehand.

It is significant to note that the comforting work of the Spirit in Acts

9:31 resulted in the **growth of the church**. Therefore, the early disciples obediently walked in the will (fear) of the Lord and the entreaty or exhortation of the Spirit. As a result, the church grew. When the disciples are in an environment of peace, they have a greater opportunity to share the gospel with others.

### **E. God comforts through His word.**

In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 Paul concluded a section of revelation concerning the final coming of Jesus by stating, “*Therefore comfort one another with these words.*” Paul had just revealed that the dead in Christ had not perished. They were alive in the spirit and would come with Jesus at the time of His final coming. We thus have Paul’s written revelation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 concerning what will happen when Jesus comes again. This record has come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, exhorts us to comfort one another with this inspired record of the final event of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. It is the responsibility of all disciples to talk among themselves concerning the gospel of Jesus’ coming, for in such

discussions there is comfort.

### **F. God comforts in His own ways.**

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 Paul wrote,

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, **comfort your hearts** and establish you in every good word and work.*

We do not know how God comforts in the way Paul here reveals. Paul mentioned throughout his communication to the Thessalonians how God comforts in an indirect manner. However, in this statement Paul seems to indicate that in some way God “*comforts our hearts*” in a direct way. This comforting does not refer to our salvation. It affects our mental attitudes in times of trouble or conflict.

God has given us “everlasting comfort” in the sense that we know that our salvation is secure because of His grace. However, He also comforts our hearts in times of struggle in ways that we do not understand. We simply accept the fact that He does because He has said so in His word. The fact that He says He comforts us is enough to know that there is comfort from Him upon our request.

## Chapter 20

# LEADING OF THE SPIRIT INTO FRUIT

When one becomes a Christian, he brings himself into a relationship with all of God's people and into an environment of God's work among His people throughout the world. It is in this new fellowship that God provides comfort through different means. Those outside Christ do not have access to the comfort that comes as a direct result of the close fellowship in Christ that is enjoyed by Christians.

The Holy Spirit is given credit for this comfort because it has been through the Spirit that we continue to grow and be edified by a growing understanding of the gospel that was revealed through the incarnate Son of God. When one grows in his or her understanding of the work of God in this world through the gospel, it is reassuring to know that God is always present and working in the life of the Christian.

When one submits to the lordship of Jesus in his life through obedience to the gospel (See At 2:36; Rm 10:9,10), he voluntarily brings his life into submission to the motivating power of the gospel of the Son of God. In humble obedience to the will of the Savior, one's life is transformed into a living example of the gospel of Jesus

(See Jn 14:15; 15:14). When we submit to the lordship of Jesus, our walk in life is guided by the leadership of our Savior that is revealed in the word of God (See Ph 2:5-8). As the Christian obeys and lives after the Spirit-inspired record of the gospel, therefore, the fruit of the Spirit is brought forth in his or her life because he or she is being led by the Spirit.

### A. The fruit of the Spirit:

Paul commanded that we "*walk in the Spirit*" (Gl 5:16). Walking in the Spirit is obeying the word of God that has been provided for us through the Spirit. From this guided walk, one brings forth the fruit of the Spirit. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gl 5:22,23). Howard Winters wrote,

... if one wishes to be spiritually minded he must follow the revelation given by the Spirit, the truth given in God's word, rather than seeking for the Spirit to enter in and take control. Obeying the Spirit's message, the truth of the gospel, not the Spirit Himself working directly in one, is

that which makes one spiritually minded. This is a vital point in understanding the work of the Spirit and every student of the Bible should have a firm grasp of it.<sup>16:30</sup>

The word “fruit” refers to a source from which the fruit comes. **Fruit is borne out of something that can produce.** Direction and guidance concerning divine values and principles are known and set forth in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. **We cannot know what we ought to be to please God unless such is communicated to us through revelation from God.** In this way, therefore, spiritual attitudes that are to be produced in our lives as a result of our walk after the Spirit-inspired Scriptures are credited to the Spirit for being produced.

This is the “fruit of the Spirit” of Galatians 5:22,23. Our motivation is the gospel, but the direction in living to which we are motivated is directed by the Spirit-inspired revelation of God. In other words, if one does not study his Bible, he will eventually lead himself in the wrong direction. This is how religion is developed.

One could possibly argue that more than the origin of the fruit was in the mind of Paul when he wrote Galatians 5. It could be argued that the actual production of the fruit was foremost in his thoughts as he con-

trasted the works of the flesh with that which is **produced** by the Spirit. In this sense, therefore, the Spirit is not only the source, but the aid in producing the fruit in one’s life. Sayers stated, “The thought of being able to bear the fruit of the Spirit by our own strength is at once corrected by ‘As the branch *cannot bear fruit of itself*’.”<sup>57:185</sup> Sayers gave the following illustration:

We cannot produce an echo; but we can produce the **sound** that reverberates the consequent echo. The fruits of the Spirit are borne not of the “echo” brought into being by the original sound, but the original sound is the Spirit at work in our lives producing the echo, the fruits. Even as the echo is a natural response to the positive sound, so is the fruit of the Christian, otherwise a burden, borne with much ease, consequent to and resultantly as the Spirit works within.<sup>22:185</sup>

Paul’s main emphasis of Galatians 5:22,23 was the product, the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual behavior in the life of the Christian must be credited to that from which it is inspired. The person who is bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in his life is doing so because of a submitted life to the Spirit-directed instructions of God’s word. Because one is growing in holiness

in his submission to the Spirit's leading, all credit for growth must go to the Spirit, and ultimately, to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one. The Spirit is credited for the fruit because He is the origin of the inspired guide, the word of God.

We must emphasize the fact that there are those who have the Spirit, but do not have the fruit. They were properly converted by sincere obedience to the gospel. However, because of a lack of will or discouraging circumstances, they failed to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). They ceased spiritual growth soon after obedience to the gospel. They were possibly motivated to the water by something other than the power of the gospel. Nevertheless, whatever motivated them to obey the gospel soon vanished in their lives and they became unproductive vines in the vineyard.

This would clearly manifest that the fruit of the Spirit is not "injected" by the Spirit against the will of the individual. If the producing of the fruit were subjective, that is infused by the Spirit Himself, then we would wonder why an unloving Christian would even exist. We must affirm, therefore, that one voluntarily produces the fruit of the Spirit in his life as he submits to the direction of the Spirit through the Scriptures. The gospel is the power that motivates, but

the direction to produce the fruit is the word of God.

Under this discussion of the fruit of the Spirit, we must also consider the fact that the fruit of the Spirit is brought forth in the lives of those who are not in a covenant relationship with God. There are good people in the world who have not obeyed the gospel, but they manifest the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. In fact, some often manifest the fruit of the Spirit in a greater manner than some who are in a covenant relationship with God. Would we conclude that the Spirit is working in the lives of those who are not in a covenant relationship with God? Such a conclusion would negate the advantageous relationship the Spirit has with those who have obeyed the gospel.

The point is that the fruit of the Spirit in one's life cannot be evidence of a child of God. We must also conclude that the Spirit does not have subjective control in the life of the Christian to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the Christian is still dependent on the voluntary obedience of the Christian to the will of God.

## **B. Led by the Holy Spirit:**

The fruit of the Spirit is produced in the lives of those who are led by the Spirit, and thus, walk by the in-

structions of the Spirit in response to the gospel. To be “*led by the Spirit*” (Rm 8:14; Gl 5:18), and to “*walk by the Spirit*” (Gl 5:16,25), mean the same thing. Paul used the phrase synonymously in Galatians 5:16 and 18: “*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh ... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*” This is the same thought as John’s “*walking in the light*” (See 1 Jn 1:6-9). The meaning of “*walking in the light*” was explained when John revealed his greatest joy. This joy was to hear of his children “*walking in the truth*” (2 Jn 4). When one walks in the truth of the gospel, he is continuing his obedience in response to the gospel. He is thus led by the Spirit-inspired truth of the gospel. He is walking in the light.

Paul wrote, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Ep 2:10). God created good works wherein we must walk as Christians. Paul also added,

*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; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:12,13).

Paul did not say that the Christian works for his salvation. He said to “*work out*” your salvation. We have been created in Christ, not by good works, but **for** good works. In Christ, therefore, it is our responsibility to work out the works that God has assigned us to do through His word of instruction. Though we do not have a description of all the works that we can do in order to fulfill our particular ministry, Paul gave general instructions as the following: “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men*” (Gl 6:10). James added, “*To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin*” (Js 4:17).

Knowing what to do sometimes comes from the directions of the Holy Spirit in the word of God (2 Tm 3:16). But most of the time the good that we are inspired to do originates from opportunities that come our way to do good. Therefore, the Spirit led the disciples in the first century by the inspired apostles and prophets who gave them inspired directions concerning what Christians must do (See 1 Co 12:28; Ep 4:11,12). He still leads in this way today. When we follow the instructions of these inspired men as they are recorded in the Bible, we are being led by the Spirit. At least we are being led in the direction of discovering opportunities through which we can do good to all men.

Today, we have an inspired guide for being led by the Spirit. We “walk in the Spirit” or are “led by the Spirit” when we follow the Spirit’s directions that are given to us through the inspired Scriptures. There is nothing mystical about this. There is nothing mysterious about doing what the Spirit has said to do in the Scriptures. By the Spirit-inspired word we are built up (At 20:32) in order that we might grow unto salvation (1 Pt 2:2). By the Scriptures we are encouraged to assume opportunities that lead to the benefit of others. In this way, we are being led by the Spirit.

The above is exactly how God worked in the Old Testament. God said to Israel, “*I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go*” (Is 48:17). God led Israel through instruction. In the same way, He leads the Christian today. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*” (Ps 119:105). God led Israel through inspired instructions. The Psalmist wrote, “*You will guide me with Your counsel*” (Ps 73:24). This is how God led His people in the past. We have no reason to question that He continues to so lead His people today in the same manner.

God intends to lead men to Him through the revelation of His will. Zacharias stated that God visited Israel in order ...

*... to give knowledge of salvation to His people ... to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*” (Lk 1:77-79).

Through the revelation of the gospel, God leads the unbeliever today to the way of salvation. Through the inspired Scriptures, He continues to lead those who obey the gospel to a greater spiritual life in Christ.

Paul wrote, “*Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ*” (2 Th 3:5). The Lord directs through instructions. When we walk in the light of the gospel, we are on the path of working out our salvation. Our hearts are being directed by the Spirit.

In Galatians 5:25 Paul wrote, “*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*” The word “walk” here is different from the word that is used in Galatians 5:16. In Galatians 5:25 the word is a military term that refers to one walking in file or order. Paul was thus exhorting the Galatians to obediently march after that commitment to which they made to obey the gospel. They must walk in a manner that revealed that they were living according to the mind of Christ.

A similar thought is stated in different words in Philippians 1:27: “*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” In the context

of the Philippian letter, Paul focused on the gospel example of Jesus as the impetus to walk the gospel life. In Philippians 2:5 he continued to instruct the Philippians, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2:5). Both the Philippians and Galatians were to walk according to the gospel to which they had committed themselves to live. Paul instructed the Galatians in these matters in reference to bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit. But he reminded the Philippians how to commit the instructions of God’s will to their lives. This is done by following the example of the gospel of Jesus to become the road map for one’s behavior. Peter explained: “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21).

### C. The seal and earnest of the Holy Spirit:

In 2 Corinthians 1:21,22 Paul wrote,

*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us is God, who also has **sealed** us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a **deposit**.*

2 Corinthians 1:22 in the *American Standard Version* reads a little different than the *King James Version*: “*Who also sealed us, and gave us the*

*earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*” The *King James Version* is probably more interpretive than the *American Standard Version*. Nevertheless, whether the “deposit” (earnest or guarantee) is the Spirit (KJV), or it is something the Spirit gives (ASV), is subject to discussion. This same concept is stated again by Paul in Ephesians 1:13,14:

*... you were **sealed** with the Holy Spirit of **promise**, who is the **guarantee** [earnest] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory.”*

The following are important teachings that come from the preceding statements:

**1. The seal of the Holy Spirit:** Paul affirmed that God has **anointed** us and **sealed** us. The word “seal” is from *sphragizo* that emphasizes a **mark** made by a seal. 1 John 2:20,27 is a commentary of the anointing of God that was a mark of identification of a Christian. This anointing, John wrote, “*teaches you concerning all things.*” Here is the **miraculous gift of prophecy** from the Holy Spirit that was prevalent in the lives of the Corinthian brethren as it was in the lives of John’s readers. The Corinthians were thus sealed **with the Holy Spirit of**

**promise.** They were marked as a group to be God's people by their possession of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

Specifically, the miraculous gift of speaking in languages was given as God's signal to identify His people. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Therefore, languages are for a sign, not to those who believe, but for unbelievers*" (1 Co 14:22). The gift to speak in languages was a signal to the unbelievers that Christians were God's people. This was the fulfillment of Isaiah 28:11,12. This prophecy was quoted by Paul in the context of his argument that languages were a sign that God was giving to the world that Christians, not Jews, were now His people. In this way, the gift of the Holy Spirit to speak in languages was an "earnest" and "seal" of the Holy Spirit.

We must keep in mind that a seal is something that is visually perceived. In order to be a seal, the seal had to be witnessed. This brings up the point as to whether the seal was meant to be a mark of identification for those of the world who witnessed the life of Christians, or it was witness for the presence of God. If the seal was presented before those who witnessed the believers in the societies in which they lived, then the seal would be empirically perceived by those in one's community. If the seal

were meant to be for God, then the perception of the gift by the community would not matter. God would know those who were His. Since only the Christians were those in the community who could speak foreign languages without the time-consuming process of learning a language, then the gift of languages was a sign to the unbelievers in the community.

The phrase "Holy Spirit of promise" must always refer us back to the fulfillment of the promise in Acts 2:1-4, and then, back to where the promise was originally made in Joel 2:28. **All work of the Holy Spirit must find its origin in the fulfillment of the promise of Joel 2:28.** The anointing and sealing of the Corinthians and Ephesians was a fulfillment of this promise. All Christians are included in Peter's statement of Acts 2:39: "*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*" The promise of Joel 2:28, therefore, finds its fulfillment in the Corinthians, Ephesians and every Christian since Acts 2.

The seal was a public display that God was with His people. The miraculous outpouring on Pentecost, the laying on of the apostles' hands, the miraculous gifts, and the Christians' Spirit-guided lives in response to the gospel were all manifestations of the Spirit's seal. Every manifestation of

the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early Christians was a signal of the Spirit that they were the people of God.

Today, our adherence to the truth of the gospel is a public display (the mark of the seal) that we are of God and not of the false religions of the world. God puts His stamp of approval on us when we live the gospel of the Son of God (See Ph 2:5-8).

**2. The deposit of the Holy Spirit:** The words “deposit,” “earnest” or “guarantee” are metaphors that are used to explain the same thing as the seal of the Spirit. Though the metaphor “deposit” indicates different aspects of the Holy Spirit’s relationship with the Christian, both “seal” and “deposit” are mentioned in similar contexts. The deposit (earnest or guarantee) of the Holy Spirit in the context of the early disciples was the miraculous work of God that was a manifestation to the unbelievers of the environment of the supernatural. **It was this environment to which Christians are headed in the new heavens and earth.** The miraculous of the first century, therefore, was a foretaste and pledge (a deposit) of that which is to come. The Hebrew writer gave a commentary statement on this meaning in reference to some who gave up their special relationship with the Spirit through the miraculous gifts, and went back into Judaism:

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakes 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 (Hb 6:4-6).*

Camp explained,

The word “sealed” and the word “earnest” are simply two different words expressing the same thought by two different figures of speech. The words “earnest” and “seal” both denote miraculous operations of the Spirit among the early Christians to which the New Testament letters were originally written. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. The words “Holy Spirit” and “power” are not two different things, but two words expressing the same thought. The same is true of “sealed” and “earnest” in 2 Corinthians 1:22. Both terms were used in connection with the miraculous operation of the Spirit.<sup>1:181</sup>

Some have interpreted the word “earnest” of Ephesians 1:14 to refer to a “down payment.” However, this is not exactly what Paul meant. The word was not used in the texts of either Corinthians and Ephesians to

convey this thought. Better words would be “guarantee” or “pledge.” Concerning the definition of the Greek word in Ephesians 1:14, Vine wrote,

In general usage it [the Greek word] came to denote a pledge or earnest of any sort; in the N.T. **it is used only of that which is assured by God to believers; it is said of the Holy Spirit as a Divine pledge of all their future blessedness**, 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; in Eph. 1:14, particularly of their eternal inheritance.<sup>26</sup>

**Therefore, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of this gospel dispensation was a manifestation of the blessed inheritance that is to come.** The presence of the Spirit in the lives of the early Christians assures us that we have a great inheritance that is yet to come. Through the giving of the Holy Spirit, and all blessings that resulted from His giving, God has pledged or guaranteed that greater things are yet to come.

Some would assuredly affirm that we limit the work of the Spirit in our lives by constantly directing our attention to the Scriptures that have been inspired by the Spirit for our benefit. Regardless of such complaints, we must keep in mind that we cannot confidently affirm that which

the Scriptures do not explain, or specifically promise. We might classify that which is beyond the Scriptures as the mystery of God at work. One cannot argue with this point. Nevertheless, we must guard ourselves from going astray after our imaginations, and specifically our emotions. We can guard ourselves from being carried away by our emotions or inclinations only by staying close to the Spirit’s description of His work in the Scriptures. In this way we are assured that what the Spirit does in the Christian’s life can be proved by what He says He does.

If the Spirit is to play a direct and miraculous role in the Christian’s life today as some affirm, then we wonder why this emphasis is not placed on the work of the Spirit in the New Testament. The New Testament is loaded with exhortations of how we are to conduct our lives in response to the gospel. If the Spirit is to work as some would claim He works to grow us spiritually, then why are not the Scriptures **saturated** with exhortations that emphasize His supposed direct work on the heart of the Christian to make us what we must be? A few scriptures taken out of their historical context cannot prove the tremendous overemphasis some have placed on a supposed direct work of the Spirit on the heart of man. If the Spirit supposedly works directly to

guard us from falling away, then He certainly failed in the lives of some Christians about whom the Hebrew writer spoke (See Hb 6:4-6).

On the other hand, there are those statements by the Spirit in Scripture that lead us to wonder concerning His work that is not specifically defined. We are not so analytical as to confine the work of the Spirit to our human deductions. We would assume that the Spirit is doing His work regardless of our understanding. **We will be confident in what He does only by measure of what He explains in**

**the Scriptures.** We will also allow liberty of thought and belief in those areas that are still open for discussion.

One should not be so presumptuous as to think that we can understand all the work of God the Spirit. We would have to be God to understand the totality of God's work. It is for this reason that we must assume that God the Spirit is doing His work in our lives regardless of our understanding of how and when He is doing it. It is the Spirit who blows as the wind where He wills, not where we will.

## Chapter 21

### WORK AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Work against the Holy Spirit is work to stop the Spirit's efforts to bring about the final result of the gospel. This work against the Spirit can either be revealed through hindering those who would obey the gospel or hindering those who have obeyed the gospel. All efforts to hinder the Spirit's work, therefore, must be viewed in the context of Satan's work to keep lost men lost and saved men to become lost.

#### A. **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit:**

Blasphemy against the Holy

Spirit is something that is done by unbelievers. It is their effort to reject the gospel by assigning to Satan the work of the Spirit to reveal the truth of the gospel. Blasphemy is assigning the work of God to Satan.

There are three texts of Scripture that record Jesus' reference to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28-30 and Luke 12:10. In the contexts of these three statements, the biblical interpreter must recognize two important points: (1) The Holy Spirit was working through Jesus in His incarnate state to reveal the supernatural power of God (See Lk 5:17; 6:19; 8:46). He

was doing this in order to validate Himself as One who came from God (Jn 3:2; 20:30,31). (2) In the context of these claims of Jesus that He was from God, the rebellious Jews made accusations against Him by saying, “*This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons*” (Mt 12:24).

The accusation of the Jews, and Jesus’ statement in Mark 3:30, explain the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark recorded that Jesus pronounced the accusation as blasphemy “*because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit’.*” **The blasphemy was that the Jews assigned the work of the Spirit through Jesus to have originated from Satan.** This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. When one takes the position that the miraculous work of God, either through confirming miracles or inspiration, was from Satan, then he blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. He blasphemes against the true source of the confirming miracles that validated the truth of the gospel and the messengers who took it into all the world.

The preceding is blasphemy against the Spirit because it was the work of the Spirit to work through confirming miracles and to inspire the spoken and written word of God (Mk 16:20; 2 Tm 3:16). Both in confirming miracles and inspiration, the Spirit was seeking to bring people to Jesus.

Therefore, any effort to assign these works of the Spirit to Satan, was a work against the Holy Spirit. Jesus therefore stated, “*But to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven*” (Lk 12:10). It will not be forgiven simply because the one who blasphemes **will not accept that which he assigns to Satan.** He is refusing that which will save his soul. It is the gospel that saves. If one refuses the soul-saving gospel by assigning its origin to Satan, then God cannot save him in his deception.

The above is the reason Jesus said, “*Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him*” (Mt 12:32). During Jesus’ **earthly ministry** one could speak against Him. Many of the religious leaders of the day spoke against Jesus. However, after more consideration, and the events and preaching of the apostles, “*a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*” (At 6:7).

These priests had initially rejected Jesus during His personal ministry. However, they eventually accepted Him as the Son of God because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets. Their initial sin of blasphemy, therefore, was forgiven because they eventually accepted the fact that Jesus truly was the Son of God.

However, if they would have carried on with their rejection, they

would not and could not have been forgiven. They could initially reject Jesus. Nevertheless, it was their last chance to believe the Spirit-inspired message of the gospel through the preaching of the apostles and prophets.

In the same sense, one blasphemes against the Spirit today by assigning His work of the first century to Satan. If one rejects the Spirit's call through the inspired record of the gospel (the New Testament), **he cannot be forgiven**. He cannot be forgiven simply because he refuses that medium through which he can be reconciled to God (1 Pt 1:23). If one believes that the gospel originated from Satan, then he will not obey the gospel. Therefore, all those who reject the gospel, are sinning against the work of the Holy Spirit. If they reject the Bible as the word of God, and the New Testament as the Spirit's medium through which He reveals the gospel, then they have sinned against the Holy Spirit.

## B. Resisting the Holy Spirit:

Resisting the Holy Spirit is something that is carried out by those who are in the fold of God's people. Resisting the Spirit is a reaction of individuals in the flock who stand against the instructions of God through His word. They subsequently

became apostates because they rejected God's commandments in order to keep their own religious traditions.

Resisting the Spirit simply means rejecting either the spoken or written word of God. Resisting the word of God is resisting the work of the Spirit to reveal information about the gospel through the inspiration of the Bible.

There are two examples of this resistance in the Bible. The first is in Acts 7:51 when Stephen said the following to those Jews who resisted his preaching of God's gospel plan to bring His Son into the world though Israel: "*You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.*" Stephen was stating that both Israel of the past, and the Jews of his immediate audience, had always resisted the Holy Spirit because they resisted God's efforts to bring His only begotten Son into the world. Whenever one resists the preaching of the truth of the gospel, he is resisting the Holy Spirit.

**1. Israel resisted the Holy Spirit:** The phrase in Acts 7:51, "*as your fathers did,*" refers to those in the Old Testament who resisted the Spirit's work during the Old Testament period. Stephen used the Greek word *antiptete* which means "to fall against" or "to rush against." This is

a strong word in this context, and thus clearly defines the extent of Israel's resistance of the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of Israel, as well as the Jews evil desire to stone Stephen in Acts 7. Stephen asked these resisting Jews the following question:

*Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers (At 7:52).*

Samuel also said of Israel, "*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord*" (1 Sm 15:23). Jeremiah continued, "*Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord*" (Jr 8:9). Nehemiah also explained, "*Yet for many years You had patience with them [the Israelites], and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen*" (Ne 9:30).

This is resisting the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "*All too well you reject the commandments of God*" (Mk 7:9; see Jn 12:48). He who rejects the Spirit-inspired word of God, resists the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God.

On the occasion of Acts 7, Stephen was filled with the Spirit (At

6:5; 7:55). He subsequently spoke by inspiration of the Spirit. When the Jews, therefore, resisted his inspired speaking, they were resisting the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophecy came by the will of God through the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Pt 1:21). When the Jews resisted the word of God, they were resisting the Spirit. Any rejection of the word of God, therefore, is resistance of the Holy Spirit.

**2. The Jews who were contemporary with the early disciples resisted the Spirit.** In Acts 7:51 Stephen also said that those Jews of his audience were resisting the Spirit. Luke records in Acts 6,

*Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedman ... disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke (At 6:9,10).*

The Greek word "resist" in verse 10 means "to stand against." In other words, those of the Synagogue of Freedmen could not refute the inspired words of Stephen. Because they could not refute Stephen, therefore, they determined to physically attack him. By this action, they were resisting the Holy Spirit by resisting the preaching of Stephen.

Paul also gave the example of

those who are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7). They “*resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith*” (2 Tm 3:8). When one resists the truth of the gospel, he is resisting the Spirit through whom the truth of the gospel came to us through the apostles (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

**3. Men can resist the Holy Spirit today.** Those who refuse to listen to the inspired word of God are resisting the Spirit. Those who refuse to study their Bibles are resisting the Holy Spirit. Those who pervert the teachings of the Spirit-inspired Scriptures are resisting the Spirit (See 2 Pt 3:15,16). Those who reject the application of the truth to their lives are resisting the Holy Spirit. All those who hear, but reject the gospel, are resisting the work of the Spirit through the power of the gospel.

### C. Grieving the Holy Spirit:

By manifesting a calloused attitude toward the Spirit-inspired Scriptures, one grieves the Holy Spirit. By turning away from the gospel that is revealed in the word of God, one is resisting the Spirit. Therefore, resisting the Holy Spirit is the same as grieving the Holy Spirit, for it grieves the Spirit when people do not respond to the gospel of God’s grace that is

revealed through His inspired New Testament Scriptures.

When the Spirit is resisted, He is grieved. God grieved over rebellious Israel during their forty years in the wilderness: “*For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways’*” (See Ps 95:7-10; see also Ps 78:40; Hb 3:10,17). Israel “*rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit*” (Is 63:10). By rejecting the word of God, they grieved the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is grieved by any action on the part of the Christian that is contrary to His inspired instructions.

We must understand the meaning of Ephesians 4:30 in the context of Israel’s grieving of the Spirit in the Old Testament. Paul wrote, “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*” In the context of Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul was instructing the Ephesian Christians to live according to the Spirit-inspired behavioral patterns about which he was writing. Therefore, the Ephesians, as well as we today, can grieve the Holy Spirit if we willingly reject the instructions concerning gospel living that is explained in contexts as Ephesians 4:25-32 (See also Cl 3). Anyone who lives in a manner that is contrary to the instructions the Spirit has brought to us through the inspired word of God, is grieving the Spirit.

## D. Despising the Holy Spirit:

Despising the Spirit is similar to blasphemy of the Spirit, that is, rejecting the teaching and work of the Spirit in this age of the Spirit. The Hebrew writer defined apostates in the following words: *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”* (Hb 10:26; see Hb 6:4-6). The one who has *“counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing,”* does, as the *American Standard Version* translated Hebrews 10:29 reads, *“despite unto the Spirit of grace.”* When people do this, they cannot be forgiven because they have rejected the sacrificial blood of Jesus that can cleanse them of sin.

By rejecting the word of God, one despises the Holy Spirit. Such is what Israel did. God said that He would consume them *“because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel”* (Is 5:24). This concept is stated only once in the New Testament. Paul wrote, *“Do not despise prophecies”* (1 Th 5:20). The Thessalonians were encouraged not to do what Israel did. They must not reject the inspired instructions of God. In the historical context in which this statement was made, instructions for gospel living came through the in-

spired preaching of the New Testament prophets. If they rejected the preaching of the inspired prophets in their midst, they were despising the work of the Spirit. Therefore, anyone who would despise the word of the Spirit is despising the Spirit.

## E. Quenching the Holy Spirit:

Paul wrote, *“Do not quench the Spirit”* (1 Th 5:19). The word “quench” is from the Greek word *sbennumi*. The Greek word comes from the idea of a flame that is being put out. The same word is used in Matthew 25:8 in reference to the lamps of the five foolish virgins that were “going out.”

In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul was commanding the Thessalonians not to despise prophecies. In other words, they were not to discourage or reject the preaching of their preachers. The word of God is as a fire (Jr 23:29). Any time one rejects or discourages the preaching of the Spirit-inspired word of God, he is quenching the Spirit. He is putting out the fire of the word of God.

One can know if he is working against the Spirit in the matter of blasphemy, resisting, grieving, despising or quenching. It is not a subjective guess or opinion that one is working against the Spirit when he refuses to

be obedient to the word of God. One consciously knows, and can identify his work against the Spirit when he has a knowledge of the commandments of God, and yet, refuses to be obedient. Others can see his work against the Spirit. One despises, resists, grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit by openly rejecting the application of the word of God to his life.

Most Christians do not behave according to their own expectations. They intellectually know what to do. However, they are usually striving to do what the Scriptures instruct them to do in response to the gospel. Such striving to grow without realizing the instructions that are explained in the Scriptures is not quenching the Spirit. Simply because one has not spiritually grown to where he understands

what the Scriptures teach does not mean that he has resisted, despised, quenched or grieved the Spirit. He may not have tried enough to grow. However, if he is not openly working against the knowledge of and application of the gospel to his life, he is not resisting the Spirit.

In the context of the above works against the Spirit in the New and Old Testaments, reference concerning grieving, resisting, despising and quenching of the Spirit is always a reference to those who are manifesting open rebellion in their lives against the gospel that is revealed in the word of God. When one refuses to intellectually accept and apply the gospel as a pattern of life, he is resisting, grieving, despising and quenching the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 22

### UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

We unfortunately now live in a religious world that has long forgotten the joy of serious Bible study. The word “study” seems to frighten people when it comes to interpreting and applying the will of God to their lives. People are more focused on either experiential religion, or relational encounters with one another. The focus of the past for building our faith on the fruits of our Bible study has long

faded. Few people today assemble together around open Bibles in order to discover valuable truths and principles by which they would know God and His plan to bring us into eternal dwelling.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the other inspired writers of the Bible, received the truth through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, it will take nothing short of perspiration

on the part of Bible students today to understand and apply the inspirational truths that are revealed in the Bible. This does not mean that it is difficult to understand those things that are fundamental for our salvation. It does mean, however, that we must apply diligent Bible study principles in order to be effective students of the word of God. There is no easy road to biblical interpretation. If one does not understand the Bible, the only way to understand it is through diligent Bible study.

Many people today have a difficult time understanding the Scriptures because there is little emphasis placed on studying the Bible. In fact, one of the most common prayers that is offered by some is a prayer for a correct understanding of the Scriptures. This is the prayer of many because they suppose that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to help the Christian understand the Scriptures. But if this plea in prayer were valid, then we would have no need for Bible study, and, we would all understand the Bible alike.

There is also the prevalent belief today that God continues to reveal new truth to man through the Holy Spirit. Some affirm that the Scriptures are out-of-date, and thus, there must be more truth revealed to us today that applies directly to our situation. It is believed that the Bible does not furnish the Christian today with spiritual

guidance that is relevant to his modern living situation. Therefore, it is necessary that God continue to reveal truth to man in order to cope with new historical problems in these modern times.

There are also those who have maintained the view that the Bible cannot be interpreted or understood by ordinary individuals. Interpretation is reserved for priests and popes who deliver to the ordinary members an inspired interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>25:63-77</sup> For example, it is taught by the Catholic Church that the truth of the word ...

... is of necessity hidden from other persons. It is only known through divine revelation given to the Church, which is the sole guarantor of the fact. It carries with it absolute absence of error ....<sup>26:256</sup>

Therefore, it is concluded, interpretation is reserved for the officers of the Catholic Church and their interpretations are to be infallible.<sup>26:259,260</sup>

Another form of this doctrine that is propagated in the religious world is the concept that the Holy Spirit inspires every individual member to understand the Scriptures. It is affirmed that the Holy Spirit “comforts, sustains and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth.”<sup>27:44</sup> It is believed that the Spirit guides us

to understand the Scriptures in order that we might obtain the truth revealed therein. Therefore, it is affirmed that one of the works of the Spirit in the life of the Christian is to guide the Christian into a greater understanding or interpretation of the Scriptures.

Since there is no promise in the Bible that the Spirit would aid the believer to understand the Scriptures, we should be cautious about our prayers. We must not pray for God to steal away our responsibility to take ownership of our own Bible study. We sometimes make requests in prayer for things that are not promised in the Bible. Prayers for inspiration in the interpretation of the Bible are actually a request for personal inspiration as that which was reserved exclusively for the original writers of the Scriptures. The manner by which statements are often made in prayers today is actually a request to God for inspiration by the Holy Spirit. We affirm that the original writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write Scripture. But some assume that the Holy Spirit must continue this work by inspiring us to understand what He inspired the original writers to write.

For example, Ellen G. White of the Adventist persuasion affirmed a special “illumination” of the Scriptures. In this “illumination,” she was affirming inspired understanding or interpretation of the Scriptures. She

affirmed what many are saying today concerning the supposed work of the Spirit in aiding the Christian to understand the Scriptures. She claimed inspiration. If we would consistently follow through on the statements made by some in prayer today, they too are also praying for “illumination.”

If the Holy Spirit does help through inspired understanding of the Scriptures, then we could not make any mistakes in interpreting the Scriptures. But we do. And the fact that we do differ in some areas of interpretation, and often make mistakes in interpreting the Bible, is proof that the Spirit does not inspire understanding of the Scriptures. In fact, after one has personally grown in his or her Bible studies, and thus able to better understand the Bible, then he or she learns that the Holy Spirit did not inspire any understanding of the Bible in his or her younger years as novices of Bible study. We understand the Bible as we study it throughout the years. We reexamine familiar passages in the context of having learned more Bible.

As a student of this book, different people may have disagreed with the author concerning certain points of interpretation. We are both sons of God, having the Spirit of God. However, the fact that we disagree concerning points of interpretation of particular scriptures is evidence that

the Spirit is not leading either of us to produce an infallible interpretation of the Scriptures. We would not, therefore, be so presumptuous as to claim that what we affirm in this book is an inspired interpretation of the Scriptures concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. The author has prayed for wisdom, but not for inspired interpretation.

Consider the predicament of the unbeliever. If the believer must have the aid of the Spirit in order to understand the Scriptures, then what about the unbeliever who picks up a copy of the Scriptures and searches for God's mystery of the revealed gospel? If the believer must have the aid of the Spirit to understand the gospel that is revealed in the Scriptures, then it stands to reason that the unbeliever must have the same help as the Christian in order to understand the Bible. If not, then he is hopelessly unable to understand what God would require one to do to be saved. After all, it is more important for the unbeliever to understand what to do to be saved than for any believer to understand all of what John wrote in the book of Revelation.

It would be illogical for one to write a letter to a friend, and then go to that friend in order to interpret what was written. The same would apply to God's letters to us. Why would God write inspired letters to us that

pertained to our salvation, and then have to send the Spirit in order that the letters be understood? Cannot the Holy Spirit communicate to us in a manner that can be understood?

Paul wrote letters to numerous churches and individuals. However, there was no need for him to go to those churches and individuals in order to interpret his letters. **Neither did he make any promises in the letters that the Spirit would aid them to understand what he wrote.** The promise is just not there. Why would we be so presumptuous as to affirm that the Spirit does something that He did not promise to do for the recipients of the original letters?

In fact, Paul wrote a letter to the Thessalonians concerning various teachings, specifically teachings that dealt with the final coming of Jesus. He revealed these teachings in the letter of 1 Thessalonians. However, the Thessalonians misunderstood some of the teachings of the 1 Thessalonian letter, believing that Paul taught that Jesus was coming immediately in their lifetime (See 2 Th 2:1ff). As a consequence of their misunderstanding of his letter, he wrote a second letter in order to correct their misunderstandings of his first letter. Our question is, **Why did not the Spirit guide them into a correct understanding of the first letter?** If it were the work of the Spirit to inspire interpretation,

then why did He fail in the Thessalonians' understanding of the first letter concerning the final coming of Jesus?

James wrote, "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (Js 1:5). There is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom may help us apply knowledge. Wisdom will help us understand the application of the knowledge we receive through diligent Bible study. **God promises to give wisdom, not knowledge. In the first century, He initially gave knowledge through the miraculous gift of knowledge. The miraculous gift of knowledge, however, has passed away** (1 Co 12:8; 13:8). This miraculous gift does not exist today.

Nevertheless, by the wording of some prayers, some seem to be praying for this gift. God does not give miraculous knowledge today as was given through the miraculous gift of knowledge in the first century. However, He does give wisdom to those who ask. If we seek knowledge concerning all things in reference to God and His work through the gospel, we must study His communication to us through His word.

In Colossians 1:9 Paul referred to the gift of knowledge that was exercised by some among the Christians in Colosse:

*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be **filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.***

We must ask how were they being filled with the knowledge of His will? Peter had commanded, "*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pt 3:18). Both the church in Colosse and Peter's readers were growing in knowledge through the gift of prophecy and knowledge that was exercised by those on whom the apostles had laid hands (See At 8:18). Added to this source of knowledge were the inspired letters of the day that were being copied and distributed among the early disciples. Their study of those letters increased their knowledge. However, through the gift of knowledge they were being taught by their inspired prophets.

In their historical context, Paul and Peter were exhorting them to **listen to their prophets**. Because they did not have the complete written New Testament documents, these exhortations focused more on listening to the **spoken New Testament**, rather than reading the **written New Testament that they did not have in their hands**. For us today, however, the exhortations are to study the written

New Testament documents in order to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. This is necessary because the gifts of prophecy and knowledge have passed away (1 Co 13:8,9).

If we use the word “understanding” as a synonym for wisdom, then God would give understanding. However, in the context of this study, **we are discussing inspired understanding that we define as inspired in-**

**terpretation.** God does not give this today and never has. He gives wisdom, though this wisdom will certainly aid one to better understand or apply the inspired Scriptures.

We should pray for wisdom. Since God has never given direct interpretation of the Scriptures, one should ask for that which God has promised. And what He has promised is wisdom in order to apply His will that has been revealed.

## Chapter 23

### THE COMMUNICATION OF GOD

**The Bible was written in a language and style that makes it easy for diligent Bible students to understand.** It was written in a literary style that would clearly communicate the message of God to all those whom God sought to reveal His will. Therefore, the fact that God communicated through written words that were easy to understand is one of the best arguments for the view that God inspired the Bible to be written. We know that God knew how to communicate to His people, and thus, He communicated through written words in such a way as to be understood by those to whom He wrote. Camp added, “There would be no point in giving revelation if it was impossible to understand the revelation when it was given.”<sup>1:33</sup>

God did not have the Bible written in a manner that would confuse or frustrate those to whom He directed the message of the Bible, especially the message of the gospel. God used communication that could be understood. And for this reason, He would not allow any person the opportunity to offer any excuse for his lost state on the basis that he or she could not understand the message of the gospel.

#### A. God communicated through different languages.

An autograph is the original document that was written by the inspired writer. The original autographs of the Old Testament were written in Ancient Hebrew, the language of the

Jews. Ancient Hebrew was the “Jew’s language” before the Babylonian captivity (2 Kg 18:28; Ne 13:24). While in Babylonian captivity, small portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, the language of Israel’s captors (See Ez 4:8 - 6:14; 7:12-26; Dn 2:4-7).

The original autographs of the New Testament were written in *koine* Greek. The word *koine* is a Greek word that means “common.” Koine Greek was the language that was spoken by the common people of Jesus’ day. God did not use Ancient Greek to communicate His message to the Christians of the first century. He used a language that could be easily understood by those who first received the New Testament letters. The fact that He used the common Greek language of the day, indicates that He wanted His word to be understood by ordinary people.

Language is the medium by which men communicate. The words of a language communicate ideas in reference to experiences and relationships. When God used languages of men to communicate His revelation to man, the purpose was clear for doing such. He wanted to be understood. His message was simple. Those things that God wanted us to know, He communicated in a way that

we could understand (See Dt 29:29). Those things that we could not understand by the words of human communication, God chose not to reveal.

An example of the above was when Paul was caught up to the “third heaven” and “*heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*” (2 Co 12:4). What Paul saw was not to be uttered for two reasons. First, he saw the secret things that God did not want revealed. Secondly, he saw things that could not be revealed by the **words of man**. Only a “heavenly dictionary” could have been used to define those things that Paul saw. God, therefore, did not allow Paul to write about the things he saw simply because we could not have understood them anyway. God has revealed just enough about what is to come to excite our imagination. However, He has chosen not to reveal that which would confuse us with our earthly understandings.

If God had not desired to communicate His will to common man in a simple language, then we would assume that He would not have used the languages of ordinary people for His communication. The fact that He did use the languages that were common to man is proof that He seeks to communicate in a way that can be understood.

## **B. God communicated through different writing styles.**

God did not, through the Holy Spirit, dictate a style of writing to the inspired writers that could not be understood by the ordinary person. He allowed the inspired writers to use their own styles of writing and vocabularies as He carried them along in the process of inspiration (2 Pt 1:21).

The Holy Spirit not only wanted to use the languages of the ordinary person to communicate the will of God, He also wanted to allow the writers as much freedom as possible to use their own writing styles. These styles of writing are not easily discovered by reading translations of the original languages. The writing styles are detected in the original languages in which the writers wrote. Careful investigation of the original languages of the writers clearly reveals the different styles of writing and vocabularies that were allowed by the Holy Spirit.

Now the question is why would the Holy Spirit allow the writers to use their own writing styles and vocabularies? Why would He allow such if He did not want His message clearly communicated in the closest cultural and linguistic manner possible? The answer is in the fact that in order for the message of God to be clearly understood by contemporary

readers, the Spirit inspired men to communicate in styles of writing and vocabularies that were common in the contemporary literature of the times.

The Bible was not written to Bible scholars in ivory offices and quiet libraries. It was written in a style that would allow the average individual on the farm, or in the market place, to understand it. When John wrote to his new converts in the faith (See 1 Jn 2:1), he did not write to those who claimed to be special scholars or intellectuals. He did not write with a complicated style and vocabulary that demanded an interpreter or the Holy Spirit to understand.

If we believe that the Bible could not be understood by those to whom the inspired letters were first written, **then we would be accusing the Holy Spirit of not being able to inspire a letter to be written that would be able to be understood by the common man.** This would be an accusation against the ability of God to communicate to His people. If God did communicate in a way that needed the Holy Spirit on the other end of the communication in order that the message be understood, **then we would expect to find promises concerning this work of the Spirit in the communication itself. However, we do not find these promises.** And if God did not promise that the Spirit would aid in understanding His communi-

cation in the first century, then such promises are not made to us today.

If God wanted to communicate His will to His people in a manner that necessitated an inspired interpreter in order to understand, then we would wonder why He would have the Bible written in the first place? Why not just provide inspired prophets throughout history as in the early church when the Scriptures were being written? If the Holy Spirit is needed in order to understand the Bible, has He been doing such since Moses first inscribed the first parts of the Bible almost 3,500 years ago? If the Spirit is needed to understand the Scriptures, does this mean that the Holy Spirit inspires the unbeliever to correctly understand the word that communicates the gospel?

We must keep in mind that the Spirit and the angel sent a teacher to the Ethiopian eunuch, who connected all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment in reference to Jesus as the Messiah (See At 8:26,29-35). The Spirit did not inspire the eunuch to understand Isaiah 53, the text that he was reading when he encountered Philip. In this case, it was the teacher, not the Spirit, who explained the Scriptures. The eunuch understood what Isaiah wrote, but he did not understand the fulfillment. He could not connect the dots between prophecy and Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that its purpose for being written was to reveal the truth of the gospel to all people. Therefore, this revelation of truth had to be clearly understood by those to whom the documents were written. God did not have the Scriptures written in a way that would cause religious confusion and division. He inspired it to be written so that we might know precisely what to do in order to be well-pleasing to Him in our response to the gospel.

### **C. The Bible is God's revelation for all the world.**

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God revealed His will to all people in order that we might understand what He planned and accomplished through the incarnate Son of God. There are several examples of this point in the Bible:

**1. *Josiah understood God's revelation.*** God revealed His will in the Old Testament in a manner that could be understood without the help of either the Holy Spirit or an inspired interpreter. An example of this would be 2 Kings 22 where a copy of the Old Testament Scriptures was found during the reconstruction of the temple. Hilkiah, the priest, brought the newly discovered Scriptures to Shaphan who "*read it before the*

king” (2 Kg 22:10). “*Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes*” (2 Kg 22:11). Josiah, the king, did not need an inspired interpreter, or the Holy Spirit, in order to understand what was written in the book. He understood exactly what the book meant when it was read. As a result of his understanding of what was prophesied in the book when it was first written, he tore his clothes in repentance.

**2. Israel understood God’s revelation.** When Israel came into the land of Canaan, the nation stood in front of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Joshua then . . .

*. . . read all the words of the law ... that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel (Ja 8:34,35).*

No interpreter stood between Joshua and the people of Israel. The Holy Spirit did not give them an inspired understanding of the word. They simply listened and understood the reading of the law.

**3. The Ephesians understood God’s revelation of the gospel.** God personally revealed the gospel to Paul. Paul then wrote the revelation of the gospel to the Ephesians and others.

He wrote that by “*revelation He made known to me the mystery [of the gospel] (as I wrote before in a few words)*” (Ep 3:3).

In Ephesians 3:4 Paul made a very important statement concerning the Ephesians’ understanding of this revelation of the gospel that he wrote to them. He said, “*by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*” Paul did not promise that the Spirit would lead them into an understanding of what he wrote. The Spirit, in the writing itself, was communicating the mystery of the gospel. If the Spirit was able to communicate through writers as Paul in a way that could be clearly understood, then why would we need the Holy Spirit today to interpret the message of the gospel for us?

If one asserts that the Spirit was needed in order for the Ephesians to be able to understand the letter of Ephesians, then he is saying that the Spirit was unable through inspiration to communicate the message of the gospel in a manner that could be understood by ordinary people.

Paul did not state in the letter of Ephesians that the Spirit would enable them to understand the letter. Neither did he make such a promise in reference to any other letter he wrote. If he did not make such a promise when he first wrote the let-

ters, then certainly such a promise is not made today through the same inspired letters that he wrote in the first century.

The New Testament was written that we might understand the mystery. **We do not need inspired understanding in order to understand the inspired writings.** Paul's purpose in writing was the same as all inspired writers. He thus commanded readers to "*acknowledge that the things which I [Paul] write to you are the commandments of the Lord*" (1 Co 14:37). The inspired writings are the clear commandments written for Christians of all history until the end of time (See Rv 2:1,3,12,18; 3:1,7,14). Therefore, "*blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words*" of the Lord (Rv 1:3).

The Bible affirms that when we read it we can understand the commandments of God. These commandments are clear and not hidden in mysterious literary words. God never communicated anything that was necessary for salvation in a manner that was difficult to understand.

**4. We can understand God's revelation.** When the original autographs were sent to the first readers, these inspired writings could be understood by the recipients. Our task in understanding the Bible today is a little more challenging because we are **culturally** and **linguistically** re-

moved from the setting and language of the first audience. This fact sometimes makes it more challenging to understand some of the content of the Bible books. This is especially true in reference to understanding cultural and historical matters that are mentioned in the Bible. However, God never intended that an understanding of the cultural details of the Scriptures would be necessary in order to understand what one must do to please Him. God never intended that we would even have to know the original languages in which the autographs were first written. Everything that is necessary for salvation has been clearly revealed and clearly understood. Even in translations, the message of the gospel is clearly understood.

We are today in the same situation as the Jews who had returned to Palestine after several decades of captivity. When they returned, "*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*" (Er 7:10). Ezra had to do this because many of the captives who had returned could not speak or understand the Ancient Hebrew in which the Old Testament text was first written. The language of the returned captives was probably Aramaic, the language of their captors. They were several centuries removed from the original writing of the books of Moses and the

prophets. God did not use the Holy Spirit to inspire their understanding of the Scriptures. He used Ezra the teacher, who acted as an **interpretive bridge** to help those people who were not familiar with the language and culture of the original writings. God did not send the Spirit to them in order to aid their understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. Neither does He send the Spirit today to help us understand the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

When Ezra stood before Israel, he read and explained the Scriptures. *“Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation of men and women and all who **could hear with understanding** ...”* (Ne 8:2).

*Then he read from it ... before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law”* (Ne 8:3).

Because the people were not familiar with ancient Hebrew, Nehemiah also ministered the word of the Lord to the people:

*So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading”* (Ne 8:8).

In this post-exile situation, it is

clear that the teachers both translated and interpreted the Scriptures for the people. Those who studied and interpreted the written word of God taught it to the people. The Holy Spirit did not influence the minds of the people. He did not aid the teachers to understand the Scriptures. God worked through the knowledgeable teachers in order to communicate His will to those who were culturally and linguistically removed from the original writing of the Scriptures. We would assume that teachers today must study in order to do the same for the people. We cannot find an excuse for our laziness to study the Bible by assigning our understanding of the Scriptures to a supposed inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

#### **D. The Bible was written to be studied.**

God desires that His inspired word be studied. This is not something that necessarily needs to be commanded. If one claims to be a Christian, then certainly it will be his desire to seek communication from God. It is assumed that one who loves God and His word, will be zealous to study the Bible. The older *King James Version* translated 2 Timothy 2:15 in the following manner: *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,*

*rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

Later versions more correctly translate the Greek wording of 2 Timothy 2:15. The *New King James Version* reads, “***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.***” If one diligently seeks God, then it is obvious that he will be a diligent student of the word of God. If the Bible were intended to be understood by the aid of the Holy Spirit, then we would wonder why there would be the necessity for diligent study? The fact that God calls on Christians to be diligent in their study puts the responsibility for understanding the Scriptures on the shoulders of Christians, not the Holy Spirit.

Acts 17:11 is an example of **unbelievers** searching and studying the Scriptures. Concerning the unbelieving Jews of Berea, Luke wrote,

*These were **more fair-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

Could the Bereans, with their own intellectual abilities, discover by their personal Bible study the truth of the gospel that Paul was preaching? Certainly! They did not need the Holy

Spirit to aid them in order to determine the truth of Paul’s message of the gospel. If these Bereans could understand the Old Testament Scriptures through diligent study, then certainly we can do the same today.

There is no quick solution for understanding the Bible other than diligent study. No individual’s interpretation is guaranteed to be inerrant. The fact that people will come to different interpretations from the Scriptures is evidence that the Holy Spirit does not directly guide biblical interpretation. **Those who maintain the teaching that the Holy Spirit directly controls interpretation must answer the question as to why every Bible student does not have the same understanding of the word of God on every passage.** The fact that there is division in the religious world over some Bible interpretations is evidence against the concept that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to guard against wrong interpretations.

## **E. The Bible was written to be individually interpreted.**

The Bible is a book of divine revelation. This revelation was communicated to us in order that we understand both the work of God throughout history, as well as the fulfillment of prophecy in the revelation of the gospel of His Son. Christians are

commanded to study the Bible in order to reaffirm their belief in the gospel. Unbelievers are warned not to reject the Bible. The Bible, therefore, was written in a manner that could be understood by both unbelievers and believers. Unbelievers should seek to discover the gospel. Believers should seek to reaffirm their faith in the gospel.

Nevertheless, some have affirmed that 2 Peter 1:20,21 teaches that the Scriptures were never meant to be interpreted by the individual. Peter wrote,

*... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Peter 1:21 of this passage clearly explains the meaning of 2 Peter 1:20. **The Scriptures did not come to man by the will of man.** Peter taught in this statement that the Scriptures were not the product of man. They were the product of God. The *New King James* adds a footnote to the word “interpretation.” The footnote correctly suggests the word, “origin” to be used in the text for the word “interpretation.” In other words, the Scriptures were not of any private origin. Therefore, in 2 Peter 1:20,21 Peter was pro-

claiming the inspiration of the Scriptures, not individual interpretation or understanding of the Scriptures.

The Bible was written to ordinary people with ordinary understanding. Therefore, God communicated in an ordinary manner. Through the Holy Spirit God did not reveal truth in a manner that would confuse us. He did not reveal truth in a manner that would divide Bible students. He communicated His will to all people in a manner that would bring harmony and unity between honest and sincere interpreters.

We must not forget that religion, not the word of God, causes division among people in reference to religious rites, rituals and ceremonies. On the other hand, the gospel brings people together as the one body of Christ. Religion drives us further apart. Gospel brings us closer together. Therefore, one can determine if he is interpreting the Scriptures from the prejudice of his own religious heritage if the result of his studies does not bring him closer to other believers. If we seek to understand the gospel from the perspective of our religious heritage, then we will never get to the unity that the gospel naturally produces.

The reason people do not understand the Bible is not because it is difficult to understand. We do not understand the Bible because we do not

study it or we study it with preconceived religious ideas. Tradition and wrong motives too often distort objective interpretations.

Our inadequacies in interpretation of the Scriptures must not be blamed on the Holy Spirit. If we do not understand the Bible, we should

look at ourselves. The Spirit has accomplished His work with the revelation of the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is revealed in the Bible, and thus, it is the responsibility of every person to study the word of God in order to discover this truth.

## Chapter 24

### UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

By the time the reader has come to this chapter, he or she might believe that we have belabored this point too much. But consider the fact that the decline in Bible study is the most challenging problem that is facing Christians since the days of the Bible burnings of the Dark Ages. In those ages five centuries ago the Bible was forcefully taken from people of faith against their will. But in this century, the people are willingly taking the Bible from themselves.

We must base our argument on this matter in view of history. For example, it has been centuries since great scholars of Christendom in general produced monumental Bible study aids that now are infrequently used among Bible students. In contrast to centuries of the past, in this age there are no Robert Youngs who would produce documents as the *Analytical Concordance To The Bible*.

There are no M. R. Vincents who would produce such masterpieces as *Word Studies In The New Testament*. There are no renowned Bible scholars as W. E. Vine who would produce memorial study documents as *An Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*. So where are those in our age who are Bible scholars as F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, E. F. Kevans, Melvin G. Kyle, and a host of other century-past obsessed Bible students who would produce such Bible study aids that would be equivalent to *The New Bible Dictionary*, or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*?

Renown Bible scholars as Adam Clarke (*Clarke's Commentary*) and Orville J. Nave (*Nave's Topical Bible*) were Bible-obsessed Bible students of the past. The modern-day Bible student must rely on scholars who lived over a century ago in order to research

their studies today. In fact, it would be safe to say that most young “Bible students” today have not even heard of the masterpieces of Bible study aids that we have just mentioned.

Back in the 1800s, Bible schools reflected the seriousness by which people studied their Bibles. One Bible school to train preachers required students to memorize a chapter of the Old Testament in the morning, and then explain it in the evening. In the afternoon, students were required to memorize a chapter of the New Testament, and likewise explain its meaning in the evening. Another Bible school required the students to memorize Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and quote the same before they were handed a diploma for graduation. They had to do their memorization in Koine Greek. We have fallen a long way from our love of the word of God. The axiomatic truth about apostasy is that those who are involved in such never realize that they are.

The clear and present danger to Christendom for the future is the growing disinterest in serious Bible study. Perhaps in the century to come, supposed Bible students will no longer use the products of serious Bible scholars of the past, if indeed they even research such monumental literary documents today. There are no “smartphone” Bible scholars today, and never have been. Bible students

today only flip through the scholarship of the past, without any serious inclinations to delve into the Holy Writ. We are headed into a future where electronic “Bible reading” will give birth to a new generation of religionists who do not have the example of their fathers and mothers who sat down at kitchen tables and poured over Bible research in order to better understand the gospel that was revealed to us in the word of God.

As religionists head away from the Bible as their only authority in matters of faith, Christendom is becoming more religion bound with the authority of religious heritages as opposed to the authority of the Scriptures. Those who are now in their seventies and eighties know exactly what we are saying.

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that the Scriptures must be seriously studied, and thus, understood. If men were inspired to understand the Bible today, then there would be no need for diligent study. One could simply allow the Spirit to work in his or her life in order to bring forth a correct understanding of the Bible. In conjunction with this thought, there would be no misunderstanding of the Bible. All Christians would agree on every Bible subject. There would be no division over opinions, for there would be no opinions. Every interpretation would be Spirit-inspired.

However, the following New Testament writers emphasized the fact that the faithful disciple must study his or her Bible. The inspired writers received a knowledge of the will of God through inspiration. We must receive it through diligence in many hours of study.

### **A. Jesus emphasized diligent study.**

Jesus said to those Jewish religious leaders who argued with Him, *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me”* (Jn 5:39). If it were the work of the Spirit to inspire understanding, then why did not the Spirit inspire the Jewish leaders to understand the prophecies of the Scriptures as they pointed to Jesus? The fact that they were rejecting Jesus of whom the Scriptures prophesied was evidence that the Spirit did not give them inspired understanding of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, if they would have objectively studied the prophecies of the Messiah they would have concluded that Jesus was the Messiah.

### **B. Peter emphasized diligent study.**

In 2 Peter 3:15 Peter referred to some of Paul’s inspired Scriptures.

Peter said that in some of Paul’s writings there *“are some things hard to understand”* (2 Peter 3:16).

Peter was an inspired apostle, and yet, he had difficulty understanding some of Paul’s writings. He did not say that the difficult passages Paul wrote were impossible to understand. He simply said that there were some things in Paul’s writings that were hard to understand. As an inspired apostle, it would seem peculiar that Peter would say this about a fellow apostle if the Holy Spirit were supposed to aid one’s interpretation of the Scriptures. If Peter had difficulty understanding some of Paul’s writings, then certainly we will, though we have the advantage of possessing the entire written New Testament in order to compare notes.

If the Spirit did not lead Peter to understand Paul’s writings, then certainly He will not lead us to do so. Only through diligent study will we understand the writings of Paul and the other New Testament writers.

### **C. Paul emphasized diligent study.**

As stated previously, Paul instructed Timothy to give diligence to present himself approved to God (2 Tm 2:15). Why would Paul make a statement as this if Timothy could understand the Scriptures with the aid of the Holy Spirit? Why did not Paul

instruct Timothy to rely on the Spirit for a better understanding of the Scriptures? The fact is that Timothy had been taught the Scriptures from a babe. He was taught by his mother and grandmother, not by the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:15). He was encouraged by Paul to continue his studies throughout his life.

It is also interesting to note that Paul set an example of personal Bible study. While in prison in Rome he wrote to Timothy, “*Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus ... and the books, especially the parchments*” (2 Tm 4:13). These materials certainly included Old Testament scrolls that Paul used in his personal studies. They could also have included copies of other inspired New Testament documents. At the time Paul was in prison, many of the other New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written and circulated. Nevertheless, by example, the inspired apostle was here teaching that he continued in his personal studies. If it were the work of the Spirit to inspire understanding of the Scriptures, then why did Paul continue his personal studies?

1 Corinthians 2:9-13 was Paul’s explanation of how the Spirit brought to us an understanding of God’s eternal mystery of salvation. In this revelation, Paul explained the work of the Spirit: “*But 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 work of God was accomplished through the Spirit in order “*that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God*” (1 Co 2:12). Therefore, we can know the eternal mystery of the gospel because someone revealed such through Spirit-inspired Scripture. Paul stated,

*These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual* (1 Co 2:13).

The Spirit’s work in revelation and inspiration was complete when He inspired the New Testament writers to record the eternal mystery of God. His work was to make the mystery of the gospel known, and then have it recorded for our understanding. Paul added,

*... by revelation He made known to me the mystery [of the gospel] (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)* (Ep 3:3,4).

In matters of revelation and inspiration, therefore, the Spirit accomplished His work in providing the written word of God in order for us to

know the mystery of the gospel. He no longer has to reveal or have the mystery of the gospel written. It is already written in the New Testament. Winters concluded,

The Holy Spirit was not given to illuminate the understanding. The revelation of the gospel was given through those who received the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in apostolic times, but the receivers had to exercise their own mind in understanding the revelation once it was given just as all others did.<sup>16:22</sup>

In apostolic times when the Holy Spirit was revealing the mystery of the gospel, the Spirit revealed the mystery in a way that could be understood. The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles and prophets to reveal the truth of the gospel, not to illuminate the understanding of truth when it was revealed.<sup>16:23</sup>

#### **D. Luke emphasized diligent study.**

It was Luke who said that the Berean Jews were more noble than the Thessalonian Jews. They were more noble, or fair-minded, because they searched the Scriptures (At 17:11). Fair-mindedness in the sight of God, therefore, results in being a diligent student of the word of God. One can-

not be fair-minded, or noble before God, and at the same time, willingly be ignorant of the word of God.

We must remember that it is not possible for any one individual to know all the Bible. One person cannot know everything that is inferred in the Bible. However, one can certainly know all fundamental truths of the gospel that are necessary for salvation. This truth of the gospel comes to us in clear statements. No interpretation is needed. One simply needs to read the word of God with an open mind and he will discover what God requires of him in reference to obedience to the gospel.

God provided the inspired Bible for man in a way that would constantly challenge the minds of both the novice student and the learned scholar. Therefore, one should not approach the Bible with the idea that he will be able to understand everything written therein. As one studies the Scriptures, his or her appreciation of the word of God grows. The more one studies the Bible, the easier it is to understand.

#### **E. The prophets gave an example of study.**

Simply because the Old Testament prophets were inspired to write the Scriptures, this did not mean that they were inspired to understand what

they wrote. In 1 Peter 1:10-12, Peter wrote,

*Of this salvation the **prophets have inquired and searched carefully**, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, **searching** what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and glories that would follow. **To them it was revealed that, not to themselves**, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been **reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.***

Peter wrote that one should do as the Old Testament prophets who “*inquired and searched diligently*” the revelation that had been given to them concerning the mystery of the gospel. The prophets wrote the prophecies concerning Jesus, but they did not understand what they wrote. To them, the gospel was still a mystery. If the Spirit inspires us to understand, then certainly He would have inspired an understanding of the great Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah as the Savior of the world.

The fact is that even the Old Testament prophets had to study what

they wrote, just as we must study what God has written for us today concerning the gospel. The mystery of the gospel has been revealed. It has been recorded in the pages of the New Testament. However, one can never know the gospel without studying its revelation in the New Testament. It is through diligent study that one is able to “**know the truth**” of the gospel as Jesus promised (Jn 8:32). In knowing this truth, we can be set free from sin by obedience to the gospel.

In James 1:5 James wrote, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.*” James encouraged Christians to pray for wisdom. There are no instructions in the word of God that we pray for knowledge. Knowledge comes through study. The primary source of wisdom is experience. Through wisdom one’s knowledge is applied to one’s life. James’ promise that God will give wisdom to those who ask is not a vain promise. Christians have a special source for wisdom. The source is God.

Through wisdom one may better understand the Bible. However, this is an indirect manner by which we would understand the Bible. If God inspired the Christian to understand the Scriptures, then the interpreter could simply read a passage, and then give an infallible explanation of the passage. He would never misunder-

stand a passage. He would never need to study. There would be no need for preachers and teachers of the word of God.

But this was never God's intention for the saint in his relationship with the word of God. God desires that our characters be developed for eternal dwelling. He wants us to be a people who search the Scriptures in order to better understand the gospel. We must not be spoiled children who

are handed truth without diligent study. God does not give us inspired interpretation of the Scriptures simply because He is developing our thirst for Him through our diligent Bible study. As we study, we seek more knowledge from God in reference to the truth of the gospel. We thus hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to better know this God who gave His only begotten Son.

## Chapter 25

### CESSATION OF REVELATION

Bible students must clearly understand the cessation of revelation from God. This fundamental Bible teaching must be understood in order to seal for all time the complete revelation of all truth that God would have us know until the final coming of Jesus.

We live in a world of great religious division. Religionists throughout the world have affirmed continued revelation from a god that they have often created after their own imaginations or worldly desires. Others who claim some portion of Christ and the Bible, continue to profess that the Holy Spirit continues to reveal to them this or that pronouncement in order to woo their followers into believing that they speak with some au-

thority from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the biblical teaching that God closed revelation in the first century is a vital teaching against those who assume that they have to have further revelation from God, and direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

There is little difference between the doctrine that one must be led in direct understanding of the Bible and the doctrine of continued inspiration. Some have taught against the false doctrine of continued revelation of Scripture, but at the same time, they have believed and taught the doctrine of inspired understanding of the Scriptures. Both beliefs, however, are based on the same foundation of a false presupposition

The teaching that the Christian

is inspired to understand the Scriptures is simply one step closer to the teaching that the Scriptures can be laid aside for the inspired proclamations of those who claim to have a direct link with the Holy Spirit to pronounce inspired statements. If God expects us to build our characters by understanding the Bible through diligent study, then there is no such thing as inspired interpretation or inspired pronouncements. If God has sealed the revelation of all truth to man with the writing of the book of Revelation, then there has been no inspired revelation since John inscribed that book. No one is inspired by the Holy Spirit to make statements that cannot be questioned.

Various religious groups today teach that revelation by the Holy Spirit did not terminate in the first century. For example, Hugh Ireland once wrote,

There is nothing that so well proves apostasy from the Primitive Church as denial of the spirit of revelation. To state that God did once reveal Himself to His people, ... but that now He has ceased to reveal Himself, and that apostles, prophets, and inspiration are no longer needed, shows that there has indeed been a “falling away.”<sup>28:298</sup>

Fred Rolapp affirmed that “without direct and continuous revelation

from God, the Gospel cannot be understood and properly applied ....”<sup>29:1376</sup> J. M. Sjordahl wrote,

To understand the Bible, even the plainest translation, all these things are necessary as helps, and yet, without the Spirit of God to lead into all truth, not all of these helps are sufficient; so numerous and so vast are the difficulties to be encountered in ascertaining the true meaning of the Bible.<sup>30:389</sup>

In other words, we are led to believe that we cannot understand the Bible without being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Some assert that without the Spirit continuing to reveal understanding and truth to us, we are left to our own devices in reference to understanding the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church position on this matter was explained by Cardinal Gibbons when he wrote,

The Church has authority from God to teach regarding faith and morals, and in her teaching **she is preserved from error by the special guidance of the Holy Spirit** (emphasis mine, R.E.D.).<sup>25:54</sup>

The following points are set forth as arguments against the concept of modern-day revelations and inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The Bible

teaches that God has terminated His revelation of truth to man. The Holy Spirit does not inspire new truth to be pronounced by would be prognosticators. Revelation of truth has been terminated simply because the Bible contains all truth that is necessary for godly living.

### A. Revelation was completed in the first century.

The Bible teaches that the revelation of truth from God, especially in reference to the gospel message, was completed **in the first century**. This truth and gospel message was recorded in the Bible by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Consider the following points that substantiate this truth:

**1. Jesus promised that all truth would be revealed to the apostles.** In John 14:26 Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth “*will teach you all things.*” He promised the apostles,

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

Jesus made the same promise of John 14:26, but in different words, in John 16:13.

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

In order for the promise of John 14:26 and 16:13 to be fulfilled, all truth of the gospel had to be delivered to the Christ-sent apostles. Jesus made these promises specifically to the apostles. Therefore, we must assume that all truth in reference to the gospel was delivered to the apostles. Jesus kept His promise.

**2. The apostles and prophets recorded all truth of the gospel.** All truth was initially revealed to the apostles, and then to the prophets. It was recorded without error by the inspired apostles and prophets for the church throughout all history (See 1 Co 2:10-13; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 3:16). There is no promise of truth to any other party outside the apostles, and then the Spirit-inspired prophets.

**e. The truth has once and for all time been delivered to the saints.** The revelation of the final truth from God was revealed and recorded in the first century for the saints. This truth, “the faith,” has once and for all time been revealed to the saints. Jude wrote,

*Beloved, while I was very diligent to*

*write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jd 3).*

Peter similarly wrote that God's ...

*... divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pt 1:3).*

Because the revelation of this truth was finalized by the time of the middle 60s when Jude and Peter wrote, Christians of the first century, as well as we today, have been warned not to add to this revelation of the gospel. The following key scriptures are warnings against any who would seek to add authoritative "truth" to the gospel message:

**a. Galatians 1:6-9:** In this passage, Paul wrote,

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to*

*you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*

In the preceding text Paul used a hyperbole to say that even if it were the case that even if an angel from heaven should preach another gospel, he would be accursed. If Christians should not listen to an angel speaking something different than that which has been revealed, then surely they should not listen to some man preaching a supplemented gospel that is not revealed in the Scriptures.

The "other gospel" about which Paul was speaking in Galatians 1 was adding to the gospel of the incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, coronation, and eventual consummation of all things when Jesus comes again. There were some judaizing teachers among the Galatian disciples who were preaching the gospel of God's grace through Jesus, but they were adding to this gospel the necessity of meritorious works. In the case of the Galatians, certain works of the Sinai law, as circumcision, were being added to the gospel as a requirement for salvation. When one adds any meritorious system of religious rites and rituals to the gospel of God's grace, then he is preaching another gospel. Paul's argument in Galatians

1:6-9, therefore, is that we are justified freely by the cross, and not with the addition of works of merit.

**b. 2 John 9-11:** John wrote,

*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*

John warned that those who go beyond that which has already been revealed (the “teaching of Christ”) do not have God. The revelation of the gospel of Christ is here considered final. Nothing is to be added to it. Therefore, if one would teach in a manner by which he binds on men religious ceremonies and rites that are not a part of the teaching of Christ, then he has gone beyond the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. The fact that one must abide in and not go beyond the teaching of Christ, emphasizes the fact that by the time John wrote 2 John 9-11 all teaching had been revealed concerning that which was necessary for the Christian to understand and follow in order to be a disciple of Jesus.

**c. John 12:48:** Jesus said, “*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.*”

**Jesus’ word is the final authority** by which we will be judged in the last day. Since His word will be the standard by which we will be judged, then it follows that His word is final. We will not be judged by the word of any other religious catechism or leader. This is true concerning any word that Jesus spoke to His disciples while He was with them in His earthly ministry, as well as all truth that He revealed to them when the Holy Spirit later came upon them (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

**d. Revelation 22:18,19:** In his conclusion of the book of Revelation, John wrote,

*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

Though this passage refers specifically to the book of Revelation, the principle is certainly all-inclusive in reference to all of God’s revelation.

Such was evident in passages as Deuteronomy 4:2 where God told Israel, *“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it.”* With the same principle in mind, the Proverb writer warned, *“Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you and you be found a liar”* (Pv 30:6).

There are statements throughout the Bible that emphasize the fact that the Bible alone is God’s final revelation to man. It is God’s final communication to man, and thus, God expects all men to submit to the principles of His will that are revealed in the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 Paul discussed the cessation of the gift of prophecy. This gift centered around speaking the truth by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As discussed previously, this gift has ceased with the termination of the rest of the miraculous gifts. **Therefore, in the cessation of this gift, there is no more inspired speaking of God’s word.** Christians today have in the Scriptures all that is necessary for godly living (2 Tm 3:16,17). They now have all that is necessary for godliness (2 Pt 1:3).

## **B. All-sufficiency argues against continued revelation of truth.**

Contrary to the teaching that we

need more revelation of truth today, the Bible teaches that it is completely sufficient to supply the Christian with all that is necessary for gospel living. The Christian’s spiritual needs are fulfilled by one’s direction in life through the Scriptures. In other words, any teaching that states that we need more revelation from God today for spiritual direction is a denial of the Bible teaching that it is completely sufficient to supply us with all things that are necessary for instructions in living the gospel (See 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3).

**1. The Scriptures are sufficient for gospel living.** The spiritual direction of the Scriptures that was available to Christians in the first century is also available to Christians today. The word of God still does for us today the following things that it has always done:

- a. The Scriptures can be heard (Mt 13:9,43; Lk 16:29; Jn 6:45), understood (Ep 3:4,5), and believed (Jn 20:30,31; At 8:12,13, 37,38; 13:48).
- b. The Scriptures can teach the Christian (Ps 119:103,104; Pv 22:6; Rm 15:4).
- c. The Scriptures admonish the Christian in moral conduct (1 Co 4:14; 10:11).
- d. The Scriptures reveal the will of God (2 Co 13:5,10; 2 Pt 1:12).
- e. The Scriptures give instructions as to how Christians relate with one another (Cl 1:4-10; 1 Tm 3:14,15).
- f. The Scriptures can guard the Christian against apostasy (Mt 4:4-11; 2 Tm 3:14-17; 2 Pt 1:12; Jd 17-21).

- g. The Scriptures assure the Christian of his salvation (2 Pt 1:9-11; 1 Jn 2:3-6; 5:13).
- h. The Scriptures reprove, rebuke, correct and instruct Christians (2 Tm 3:16).
- i. The Scriptures bring fellowship between Christians and God (1 Jn 1:1-4,6-10).
- j. The Scriptures motivate the Christian to live a better life (1 Pt 5:12; 2 Pt 1:12-14).

The word of God is able to accomplish at least the above functions in our lives. Those who seek added revelation from God today are asking for more than what God promised. They are asking for direction and motivation from the Holy Spirit that God never promised to give outside the revelation of His word. If one asks for more than what the Scriptures provide, then he is making an accusation against the Scriptures. It is an accusation that says that God cannot do through the direction of His word that which He intended to accomplish in the life of the obedient. This is thus an attack against the sufficiency of the Scriptures. It is an effort on the part of the individual to not take ownership of his own responsibility to study and apply the word of God to his own life.

**2. Modern-day revelation could not accomplish more than the Scriptures.** The Bible teaches that the following could not be accomplished by new revelations from God. If these things cannot be accomplished, then why would we need new revelations?

- a. New revelations could not deliver to us another gospel. Christians are under the strict command not to preach any other gospel than that which has been revealed (Gl 1:6-9; 2 Jn 9-11).
- b. New revelations could not produce another means of salvation for man. All that was necessary to produce salvation in the first century (the gospel of Christ) is also available for men today (Rm 1:16; 6:3-6; 1 Co 15:1-4). For one to be saved today, he must obey the gospel that is revealed in the Bible (2 Th 1:8).
- c. New revelations could not supply us with more spiritual blessings and direction. The Bible contains all necessary information concerning spiritual blessings and direction for Christian living (See Ep 1:3; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 1 Pt 2:2; 2 Pt 1:3).
- d. New revelations could not give us more truth that is necessary for salvation. All truth has once and for all time been delivered to the saints (See Jn 16:13; 1 Co 2:10-13; Gl 1:11,12; Jd 3).
- e. New revelations cannot help us better understand the Bible. The New Testament was written in order that we have the final revelation of the mystery of God (Ep 3:4,5).

The fact that the Bible claims to be complete and sufficient for the believer is the greatest argument against supposed modern-day revelations. **God would not and did not circumvent His revelation through the Scriptures by continuing revelation unto this day. God did not minimize the Scriptures by adding new revelation for us today.** Any teaching that affirms that God added revelation to the Bible after the close of the writing of the New Testament in the first century is an affirmation that the Bible is incomplete.

Because of the will of some to place themselves in the bondage of

religion, they allow religious rites and rituals to be bound on them. This desire to be brought into the bondage of religion is so strong that people will often reject the word of God in order to keep the religious traditions of their fathers (See Mk 7:1-9). People do this in order to be accepted by the group who maintains a particular catechism of traditions. But we must remember that when traditions are honored to the exclusion of the word of God, then we bring ourselves into bondage, and thus live contrary to the will of God. It is for this reason that the word of God must be our final authority in all things that pertain to faith.

## Chapter 26

### THE TRUE CONFIRMING MIRACLE

We live in a religious world today wherein numerous claims are made concerning the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Not only is it claimed that the Spirit works miraculously through interpretation and continued revelation of new truth, but it is also claimed that the Holy Spirit continues to work miracles that continue to confirm the message of the gospel. For example, some have stated,

Miracles did not end with the Apostles. Christ Himself promised that miracles would always be a mark

of His true Church, and a gift He would always bestow upon His faithful followers, the saints.<sup>31:50</sup>

Some have been so bold as to affirm, “Whoso shall ask it in my [Christ’s] name in faith, they shall cast out devils; they shall heal the sick; they shall cause the blind to receive their sight ....”<sup>32</sup> Thus it is affirmed that confirming miracles occur today and will continue until the end of time.<sup>33</sup>

All these claims reveal that there are those who seek to walk by sight and not by faith. If one desires a miracle from God, he is desiring to

walk by sight. Thomas had this problem immediately after the resurrection of Jesus: “*Unless I see,*” he complained, “*I will not believe*” (Jn 20:25). Today, there are many as Thomas who search for a miracle in order to walk by sight. They would rob themselves of their “blessedness” of walking by faith. Jesus rebuked Thomas: “*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***” (Jn 20:29).

**Those who search for miracles are, as Thomas, actually expressing their lack of faith.** Because they lack faith, they are searching for an empirical validation of their faith. If they see a supposed miracle, they have something upon which to base their faith. This is exactly what Thomas was asking. He would not believe unless he saw and touched the resurrected body of Jesus. The religious world today is filled with those who are as Thomas. They seek miracles in order to believe.

Unfortunately, the result of such “miracle working” today has led many to not believe in the miracles of the Bible. This is especially true of an educated generation who see through the fake miracles of today. They see the hypnotic psychology that this used by “miracle workers” in order to gain either money or reputation, or both. And since they see the scandal of fake

healers in the religious world today, they read these supposed “miracles” into the text of the Bible. They conclude that if the miracles of the Bible are as the fake miracles of charismatic miracle workers today, then the miracles of the Bible are also fake.

Such is an unfortunate consequence of those frauds today who are claiming to work confirming miracles on a weekly basis in order to keep the crowds coming to their assemblies. Since this is a serious problem for those who seek to draw people to the cross through the preaching of the gospel, we need to take a moment to survey through God’s work when on occasions He unleashed the miraculous of His supernatural environment into this world.

### **A. God’s areas of work:**

As stated in previous chapters, the Christian is often misunderstood on this point. If he states that God does not work miracles today, then he is accused of not believing that God works today. If he states that God does work miracles today, then he has misrepresented the teaching of the Bible. **The fact is that the Bible teaches that God does work today in the environment of the world. This work is not according to the normal function of natural laws.** One might view God’s work in refer-

ence to this world in three different categories or areas. These are areas in which He has always worked in reference to the world He created.

**1. *God has worked miraculously.*** As previously defined, the miraculous work of God was His work that was perceived through the senses. Confirming miracles had immediate results. They could not be denied, even by the unbelievers (At 4:14-16). Through the open, visible and obvious manifestation of the presence of God of confirming miracles, the messengers and message of God were confirmed in the miracles of those who proclaimed God's word (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4). We would identify this work of God outside the ordinary function of natural law as confirming miracles.

**2. *God works behind the curtain of natural law.*** Though God may not work today through confirming miracles, He still works behind the scenes. In some way, this is "miraculous," but it is not a work of God that would be as a confirming miracle.

God works to bring about that which is good for the Christian (Rm 8:28). In answer to prayer, He works on the bodies of those who are sick (Js 5:13-16). The results of this work are certainly not the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Without our empirical notice, God can bring about

the healing of a sick person upon the request of a saint. This is God's work, but it is a "miraculous" work over a period of time. It is not according to the ordinary occurrence of natural law. We would not classify this as a confirming miracle simply because the Bible does not refer to this work of God as miraculous. Nevertheless, it is God at work outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws.

**3. *God works in the environment of the Christian.*** God also works in our environment in order to bring about His eternal purposes. We are not perceptive to these works as we would be if a confirming miracle occurred. However, by faith we assume that God is working in this world in order to raise up nations and bring them down. This is God at work. But it is not classified as miraculous work. Nevertheless, it is God at work to bring about the end of all things for the salvation of the Christian.

God could work confirming miracles today. He could openly manifest the environment of the supernatural today if He chose to do so. However, we must investigate the Scriptures in order to understand how He has chosen to reveal Himself at particular times in history. He has not always worked in the same way, or to the same degree.

It is not that we desire a confirming miracle today. All that needed to be confirmed to be true has been recorded in the Bible. We need no more confirming miracles. We simply need to believe our Bibles (Rm 10:17). Nevertheless, we must determine if it is a biblical teaching that God said He would continue confirming miraculous work throughout the history of the church.

## **B. The nature of true confirming miracles:**

The Bible's teaching concerning the nature of true confirming miracles is evidence that such happenings do not occur today. In order to answer the claim that miracles occur today, one must understand the nature of true Bible miracles that were meant to confirm either the messenger or message of God, or both.

In defining miracles, we must use only the Bible as our dictionary. We cannot use our experiential observations today as a measure by which to define true Bible miracles. The Bible must be our only dictionary to define the manifestation of a confirming miracle. Once our definition is established by the Scriptures, then we must consider whether such happenings occur today. We must also compare our biblical definition of miracles with what we hear today that are

claimed to be miracles.

**1. *Confirming miracles were clearly seen.*** The senses of man clearly and distinctly identified the biblical occurrence of a miracle. In Acts 3:1-10 a lame beggar was healed by Peter. Peter and John were subsequently brought before the Sanhedrin to answer for what they did to this particular beggar. However, when the Sanhedrin saw "*the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it*" (At 4:14).

These Jews, who did not believe in Jesus, said,

*What shall we do to these men? 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).

This miracle was so evident to the unbelievers that they could not say anything to deny it. In fact, they actually confessed that it occurred.

The above illustrates the biblical fact that confirming miracles were not worked in secret. Neither were they worked only before unbelievers. All Jesus' miraculous work could be seen by the human eye. In his defense before Agrippa, Paul said concerning Jesus,

*For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things, for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner* (At 26:26).

One of the first characteristics of a true confirming miracle, therefore, is the fact that it must be able to be seen by both believers and unbelievers.

If confirming miracles could not be clearly identified, then their true purpose would have been incomplete.

In the Old Testament, God manifested the environment of Deity before the Israelites in order to make it known that Elijah was God's prophet (1 Kg 17-21). There was no question concerning the validity of the miraculous that surrounded the life of Elijah. In the same manner, God proved Paul to be a true Christ-sent apostle by striking Elymas, a sorcerer, blind (At 13:6-12). Paul was proved to be a true Christ-sent apostle to the Corinthians by the miraculous signs that God worked through him (2 Co 12:12).

There was no question in the mind of Sergius Paulus that a notable miracle had occurred when Elymas was struck blind. There was no question in the minds of the faithful in Corinth that Paul possessed the authority of a Christ-sent apostle to unleash the power of the supernatural.

Bible miracles were unquestion-

able. No doubt was left in the minds of the beholders when a miracle occurred. The beholders may not have understood the nature of the miracle. Nevertheless, they understood that something out of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws had happened. Therefore, we must understand that a confirming miracle was something that was perceived by the observers. God intentionally made His presence known to man through such miracles. Any so-called miracle today must be an observable fact, and subsequently, cause the same reaction from those who behold the miracle.

**2. Confirming miracles clearly manifested the presence of the environment of the supernatural.** God's power was clearly seen in the occurrence of true confirming miracles. People recognized that something above the natural had occurred.

We would divide this point into two areas: (1) The manifestation of the supernatural could be seen in the inspiration of the messengers of God. (2) The manifestation of the environment of Deity could be clearly seen in the miracles that were worked by the messengers of God.

**a. The manifestation of the supernatural was clearly seen in the inspired men of God.** God warned Israel about giving heed to any self-proclaimed prophet "*that presumes to*

*“speak a word in My name”* (Dt 18:20). If the prophet spoke and the prophecy *“does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him”* (Dt 18:22). Jeremiah said of these false prophets, *“For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,” says the Lord*” (Jr 29:9). God worked miraculously in order to prove that His men were from Him. If others could work in the same manner, then there would have been no way for God to prove that His prophets were sent from Him.

God’s true messengers would be known by their message **that harmonized with all that God had previously spoken**. If any person spoke in contradiction to what had already been accepted as inspired, then that particular person was a false prophet.

The test of a true prophet was the fulfillment of his prophecy.

*As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent* (Jr 28:9).

Therefore, God’s supernatural presence was made known in the life of the inspired prophets **by the fulfillment of the things that they prophesied**. His presence was also made

known by the fact that God’s prophets spoke in harmony for centuries.

Those who claim miraculous works of the Spirit today must speak in harmony with one another. **If they contradict one another in what they preach, then they are not true prophets. And thus, the miraculous works they claim to perform by the work of the Spirit are false.** If they preach those things that are contrary to what has been revealed in Scripture, then they are false teachers. Their supposed miracles are also false.

Every messenger of God in the Bible who worked miracles spoke in harmony with all other messengers of God who worked miracles. This is a very important point that must be pressed on those who claim to work miracles today. Many individuals claim to work true miracles, and yet, they are all preaching different doctrines. Such is proof that they are not working the works of God.

**b. The supernatural power of Deity could be clearly seen in the miraculous works of the messengers of God.** The presence of the supernatural must be clearly seen in a miraculous work. When a true miracle occurred, it manifested the supernatural presence of God. For example, the dividing of the Red Sea before Moses and Israel manifested God’s presence with Israel. Moses

said to Israel, “*Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today*” (Ex 14:13).

The presence of the supernatural could also be clearly seen when fire came from heaven on Mount Carmel to prove Elijah to be the true prophet of Israel (1 Kg 18:17-46). Nicodemus said to Jesus, “*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 could see the presence of the supernatural in the works of Jesus. For this reason, Jesus called on men to believe the miraculous works that He did: “*Though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him*” (Jn 10:38; see Jn 5:26; 14:11).

During Jesus’ ministry many believed on Him because of His words (Jn 4:41,42). However, they believed on Him because of His supernatural works, for in beholding the presence of the supernatural in His works they often cried out, “*A great prophet has risen up among us,*” and “*God has visited His people*” (See Lk 7:11-16). Peter said to the thousands gathered on the day of Pentecost that Jesus and His disciples were “*attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also*

*know*” (At 2:22; see Mk 16:20; Jn 20:30,31; At 10:38; Hb 2:3,4).

The presence of the supernatural power of God was clearly seen in the working of the miracles of the disciples. This presence **could not be denied** by those who witnessed the occurrence of the miracles. There are no denials of true miracles in the Bible.

**3. Confirming miracles were not ordinary happenings.** The miracles of the Bible were recognized as something that was not ordinary. We might add that the beholders were positively convinced that what they saw was not the occurrence of some natural law. Jesus calmed a storm at sea (Mt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41). The result was utter amazement and awe on the part of those who witnessed this great power over nature. This was not the occurrence of some unknown natural law. Jesus walked on water (Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:16-21). This was not natural and possible according to natural law. As a result of His walking on the water, the disciples were “*greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled*” (Mk 6:51). Jesus also gave sight to the blind (Mt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52), changed water to wine (Jn 2:1-11), multiplied bread and fish by an act of creation (Jn 6:4-14), and a host of other miracles, “*which if they were*

*written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written”* (Jn 21:25).

We cannot claim that these events were the ordinary occurrence of natural laws that the people at the time did not understand. Jesus, Peter and Paul raised the dead (Jn 11; At 9:40,41; 20:9-12). This was definitely not an ordinary occurrence of natural laws. These were miraculous events that are yet to be copied by modern-day fake healers. In the first century, even unbelievers confessed the miraculous happenings (At 4:14-16). Today, a host of unbelievers deny the so-called miracles of modern-day healers. However, in the Bible all miraculous workings were recognized to be something different than the ordinary occurrence of natural law.

**4. *Confirming miracles occurred in such a manner as to prohibit them from being counterfeited.*** The characteristics of Bible miracles, and how they were accomplished, is evidence that modern-day healers cannot perform such deeds today.

**a. *Miracles were instantaneous and complete.*** Jesus healed known blind and crippled people in such an instantaneous and perfect manner that there was no question the healings actually took place (Lk 7:11,12; Jn 9). There was no ques-

tion that the supernatural was at work in the healing. Bible healings were complete and not partial as is characteristic of modern-day healings (See Mt 12:10-13; 15:29-31; Mk 7:31-37; Lk 22:51).

Jesus never failed to heal anyone He intended to heal. His healings were instantaneous, complete and unquestionable. This is not true of the healings of modern-day healers. There were no denials or objections to the actual happening of the miracles of the Bible. People may have objected to their occurrence on the Sabbath, but the miracles themselves were still claimed to have happened.

**b. *Miracles were worked before unbelievers. God’s messengers did not hesitate to perform miracles before unbelievers*** (See 1 Kg 18:30-40; Jn 11:45,46; At 4:14-16; 14:6-12; 26:26). In fact, the purpose of the miraculous works was to confirm the spoken word to the unbelievers (Mk 16:20). In other words, **the occurrence of miracles was often worked intentionally in the presence of unbelievers.** When this happened, there were no denials coming from the mouths of unbelievers concerning the occurrence of the miracles. Many simply confessed, *“For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done”* (At 4:16).

**5. *Confirming miracles were***

**witnessed as true in the face of severe persecution.** A true miracle will stand as true in the eyes of witnesses, even though those witnesses must pay for their testimony with their lives. The apostles had everything to lose in claiming the fact of Jesus' miracles. However, the severe persecution that encompassed their lives did not drive them to deny the fact of what they had seen in the life of Jesus. Peter and John said before a hostile court of religious leaders, "*We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard*" (At 4:20). In his latter years, John wrote, "*That which ... was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness ... and heard we declare to you*" (1 Jn 1:1-3). The test of any miracle should be the faithfulness of those who witness the occurrence of the miracle. No amount of persecution could move the early disciples to deny what they witnessed in the lives of the apostles. "*And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*" (At 4:33). "*By the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people*" (At 5:12).

Those who were cured in a miraculous manner did not succumb to the pressures of persecution. In John 9 Jesus healed a blind man. The man was brought before the Pharisees who severely criticized and rebuked him for his claim that he was healed.

However, the man stated, "*Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see*" (Jn 9:25).

Those today who claim to have been healed must also be scrutinized as the blind man was scrutinized by the unbelievers. If their healing is true, then it cannot be denied. The Pharisees in John 9 knew that the man had been healed. They could not deny the fact. Their only recourse was to cast the man out of the synagogue (Jn 9:34).

Consider this point in view of the hostility of the leaders of Judaism who were against Jesus during His ministry and throughout the early years of the church. We must not misunderstand the fact that there was tremendous persecution against Jesus and the early disciples in the region of Palestine. The religious leaders persecuted Jesus to the point of crucifying Him outside Jerusalem. The Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Saul and a host of others went forth while enduring the persecution of threats, intimidation and murder by those who sought to destroy the rise and growth of the church (At 6:9-15; 9:1; 12:1,2). This would be the same environment of preaching today in an Islamic country wherein the preaching of the gospel is illegal. In this type of political and religious environment, the word of the disciples was confirmed through the

miracles of God (Hb 2:3,4). As a result, many believed in the first century because of the miraculous works.

The miracles could not be denied by the unbelievers, though they often rejected and killed those who preached the gospel. A true miracle could be worked in the presence of non-Christians in hostile environments, and yet the miracle could not be denied. Luke recorded the following testimony of hostile Jewish leaders in Jerusalem concerning their witness of a true miracle:

*And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them [Peter and John] to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:14-16).*

## Chapter 27

### CESSATION OF CONFIRMING MIRACLES

One of the primary focuses of religion today is on "miracles." We have witnessed countless assemblies, street performances, and personal testimonies of those who have claimed to be healed by a confirming miracle. Unfortunately, the groups that promote "miracle evangelism" usually focus little on the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What has happened in many religions today is that charismatic leaders have sought to draw people to their particular religion (and coffers) by the performance of miracles. By deceptively using psychosomatic "healings" of individuals, they lure others to

come to their "miracle meetings." During these meetings there is little mention made of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and consummation of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, people are drawn to these religions by what they think they can get in reference to physical needs. Little emphasis is placed on spiritual regeneration through the offering of the incarnate blood of the cross. Subsequently, we live in a world of religion today that is composed of adherents who have been led to believe in the "gospel of miracles."

It is imperative, therefore, that

we first discover the “dots” on the subject of true confirming miracles. It is then that we can connect the dots between the purpose of miracles and that which was confirmed. In previous chapters we have identified the “dots.” It is our purpose here to now connect them in reference to the cessation of confirming miracles in order to understand that God wants us to focus exclusively on the gospel that is revealed in the Spirit-inspired Bible.

That which was confirmed, was recorded by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit now wants us to focus on the record of what He did in order to confirm the message of the gospel. He does not want us to bypass the inspired testimony of the gospel through the experience of miracles in our lives. If we continually experienced miracles, then we would be diverted from that which must be the total focus of our faith, that is, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must never forget what the Holy Spirit said in Romans 10:17: *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ [God].”*

### **A. The cessation of the authority to command the miraculous:**

The Bible teaches that the means for receiving authority to command the environment of the supernatural

has ceased. There are many today who make the claim to be able to directly command the miraculous work of God. However, their claim cannot be true if the means for obtaining this authority passed away by the end of the first century.

The Christ-sent apostles initially received the authority to command the miraculous in fulfillment of Jesus’ specific promise to them as His apostles (See Lk 24:46-48; At 1:5,8). In Acts 2:1-4 they were endowed with authority (power) from on high. As a result of this endowed authority, the Christ-sent apostles could both release the environment of the supernatural into the natural, as well as impart miraculous gifts to others. Simon saw *“that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given”* (At 8:18; see At 19:1-6; Rm 1:11; 2 Tm 1:6). The apostles first commanded the release of the power of God into this world. This “working of miracles” (1 Co 12:10) was then received by others through the laying on of their hands.

God allowed the miraculous environment of Deity to be commanded only by the Christ-sent apostles and those on whom they had laid their hands. However, there are no Christ-sent apostles today who can lay hands on others in order to impart the authority to command the release of the supernatural world into our world.

The logical conclusion is that confirming miracles as those that were worked by the early disciples do not occur today because there are no Christians in whom has been invested the authority to command the environment of Deity.

The focus on drawing people to Christ since the close of the first century has been as it was when the apostles worked their first miracle. The miracle was to confirm the message of the gospel they announced to the world. If people today would be drawn to Christ, then they must trust in the Spirit-inspired record of those confirming miracles that are recorded in their Bibles.

## **B. Cessation of the purpose of confirming miracles:**

The Bible teaches that the purpose for the occurrence of the open manifestation of the miraculous has ceased. In order to fully understand the cessation of miracles under this point, one must understand the purpose for the occurrence of miracles. Miracles did not occur in order to entertain the idle curiosity of man. God worked to accomplish specific purposes through His miraculous presence. When His purposes were completed, the miraculous manifestation of His presence was no longer needed. Consider the following purposes of miracles:

**1. Miracles proved the presence of Deity.** Gideon was a judge of Israel who first needed proof that God would be present with him in his leading of Israel against her enemies (Jg 6:33-40). God thus proved His presence with Gideon by miraculously causing dew to settle on a fleece one night, and by not causing it to fall on the same fleece the following night.

In Acts 4 a group of Christians prayed because of the miraculous release of Peter from jail: *“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken”* (At 4:31). This shaking proved that God was present with the disciples. **God bore witness with the early disciples** *“both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit”* (Hb 2:3,4). Confirming miracles validated a person or the people of God in general. But once the validation was accomplished, then the individuals and their message no longer needed miraculous validation.

Through the occurrence of miracles, men of God were confirmed to be messengers from God. God confirmed their word with miracles (Mk 16:20). Therefore, as men having the presence of God with them, they spoke in harmony with one another in order to proclaim the message of the gospel.

Many of the miraculous works of Jesus and the disciples were written

for our learning (See Jn 20:30,31; Rm 15:4). The presence of God has already been proved in the lives of those who first spoke the word of the gospel. This miraculous presence was recorded for our faith today.

The word that the early disciples preached does not need reconfirmation. In order to have proof of God's presence in one's life today, one must submit to the already confirmed word of God (1 Jn 5:1,2). Only by using the Scriptures as one's guide in life can one be assured that God is with him. We cannot trust our feelings. We cannot trust supposed miraculous works that are performed by others. For this reason, we must affirm that the Scriptures are the central and final confirming factor that determines whether one is a representative of God (See 2 Tm 3:16,17).

**2. Miracles proved the messengers of God.** God allowed His prophets and apostles to command the miraculous in order to prove to their audiences that they were God-sent. Nicodemus' statement in John 3:2 reveals this truth: "***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.***"

Many of the miracles of Jesus were recorded in order that we "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ*" (Jn 20:31). Jesus affirmed that we must believe His miraculous works in or-

der to believe in Him (Jn 10:38). "*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; see Jn 14:11). Paul resorted to this same witness concerning his apostleship. "*Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you*" (2 Co 12:12).

Paul challenged those who claimed to be true teachers. He challenged them because in their teaching they contradicted his inspired words. He used the witness of the miraculous to prove his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 4:19,20:

*But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.*

One point is set forth in this statement that we must use today in reference to those who profess that they are working confirming miracles. Paul said that he wanted to witness the actual raising of the lame and the dead by those who claimed to have the power of an apostle to do so. The fact that people do not rise from their sick bed **immediately** is proof of false healing. The fact that the cripple cannot **immediately** stand and walk is evidence of fake miracles. If those

self-proclaimed healers in Corinth could not work the signs of a Christ-sent apostle, then Paul said that something terrible was about to happen to them when he, as a Christ-sent apostle, arrived in Corinth.

Paul was on his way to Corinth with the rod of discipline if the Corinthian disciples did not sort themselves out (1 Co 4:20,21). In his second epistle, Paul warned that when he came *“I will not spare”* (2 Co 13:2). He continued that something was about to happen *“since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you”* (2 Co 13:3). The proof of Christ in him was his authority to command the miraculous of God in order to discipline the Corinthian fake apostles. Some were about to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of their flesh (See 1 Co 5:4,5). Therefore, God’s messengers were proved to be sent from God by their authority to physically discipline those who claimed to command the miraculous power of God. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning two such people *“whom I have delivered to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme”* (1 Tm 1:20). These two disciples, Hymenaeus and Alexander, sought to turn the focus of some disciples on themselves and not on Christ. Such is the effort of those today who claim to be the representatives of God through the

miracles they supposedly perform.

Since God has proved His inspired messengers in the first century, we do not need a continuation of this proof. For example, the record of Paul’s apostleship has been confirmed. Paul’s word and the inspired words of other writers have been confirmed to have originated from God. For this reason, the Holy Spirit said through Paul, *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you”* (Ph 4:9).

If we seek to follow the inspired word of Paul and the other New Testament writers, then God will be with us (See 2 Jn 9,10). We need no miracles to validate our faith. We do not need miracles today in order to prove that we are of God. Our proof that we are of God comes from our obedience to the gospel, and the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith.

**3. Miracles proved the message of God.** God manifested His presence with His messengers in order to validate or prove them and their message before unbelievers. The Lord worked with them *“confirming the word through the accompanying signs”* (Mk 16:20). When the apostles and prophets preached, God bore *“witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit”* (Hb 2:3,4).

Through messengers as himself, Paul explained that Christ accomplished His work *“in word and deed ... in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”* (Rm 15:18,19). The word of God, therefore, was validated through the power of God (1 Th 1:5; see 1 Co 14:22). Apostles as Paul (Christ-sent) and Barnabas (church-sent) (At 14:14), went about *“speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands”* (At 14:3). The purpose of miracles was to confirm the spoken word of the early evangelists.

**4. Miracles built up and edified the body of Christ.** The early church did not have the inspired **written** word of God. They had no New Testament Scriptures for about thirty years after the establishment of the church in A.D. 30. They had only the inspired **spoken** word of God until the documents of the New Testament were written and circulated. Therefore, through the miraculous gifts, the Holy Spirit directed and established the body life of the disciples.

**a. The miraculous gifts built up the church.** The church in Rome undoubtedly had miraculous gifts as a result of those converted Jews who had previously returned from one of the annual Pentecost feasts in Jerusa-

lem during and after A.D. 30 (See Rm 12:6ff). However, the number of members who possessed the gifts were limited throughout the world. Therefore, it was Paul’s desire to go to those in Rome in order that they might have many members with gifts. *“For I plan to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established”* (Rm 1:11).

Paul could impart the gifts through the laying on of his hands as a Christ-sent apostle. Through the gifts that would be distributed to more members, the disciples in Rome would be established in the faith. Such was the primary purpose of the gift of prophecy, for it was given to benefit those who **believe** (1 Co 14:22).

Miraculous gifts were given to the early disciples until they came *“to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Ep 4:13). Prophets taught the word of God by inspiration in order that the members *“no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine”* (Ep 4:14). The miraculously taught word of God was able to furnish them unto every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3). Therefore, in the absence of the written word of God (the New Testament), the Holy Spirit worked miraculously through

the gifts in order to bring the church to maturity.

**b. The miraculous gifts proved the church to be the people of God.** Miraculous gifts were also given to members of the body in order to prove that they represented the true body of believers. They were not a sect of the Jews. The miraculous work among the disciples proved that the church was different from the cults and pagan religions of the first century world. The use of this miraculous evidence to prove the validity of the disciples was evident in John's argument of 1 John. Those who were of the truth could know such by the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit that they possessed. He wrote, "***By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit***" (1 Jn 4:13; see 1 Jn 3:24).

Paul used the same argument with the Galatians in order to identify their separation from Judaism. He asked the Galatian disciples,

*Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* (Gl 3:5).

Paul asked the question and assumed the answer that they received the miraculous gifts of the Spirit after hear-

ing and obeying the gospel.

Paul was aborting their apostasy to Judaism by calling their attention to the fact that God was identifying the true people of God through the miraculous gifts. He was therefore asking them to consider the fact that they received the miraculous gifts when they became Christians, not when they were under the legalistic system of Judaism. If they returned to Judaism, they would be doing that which the apostates of Hebrews did. Hebrews 6:4 states,

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and **have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit ... to renew them ...*** (Hb 6:4-6).

Apostates in the first century gave up the confirming work of the Spirit through the miraculous gifts. They experienced the miraculous, but went back into Judaism.

Today, we have the record of both the confirming miracles and the truth of God. By this word, we can prove all things and hold on to that which is true (1 Th 5:21). Therefore, the confirming miracles of the first century are not needed today to validate our faith. If one asks for miracles today, then he is saying that the written testimony of the word of God is not sufficient in order to grow in faith.

God intended, and did confirm the Scriptures, through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. However, when the revelation of the gospel ceased, so did the purpose for the confirming miracles. Once the written testimony of the gospel was confirmed, there was no more a need to have the confirming miracles. In other words, (1) The revelation of the gospel was confirmed by miracles in the first century (Mk 16:20; At 14:3; Hb 2:3,4). (2) The revelation of the gospel was completed in the first century (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3; Jd 3). (3) Therefore, the conclusion is that there is no more a need for confirming miracles because there is no more new revelation of the gospel for Christians today. When the revelation of the word of God that explains the gospel and instructs us in gospel living ceased, so did the confirming miracles.

God intends for His written word to thoroughly furnish the man of God unto every good work (2 Tm 3:16;17). Through the written word He has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pt 1:3). Those who would contend for the necessity of miracles today are saying that the written testimony of the gospel is not sufficient to furnish the Christian completely in everything that pertains to gospel living. The argument for miracles today is an argument against

the all-sufficiency of the word of God.

We must also add that it was **not** the primary purpose of miracles to be benevolent. After all, during His ministry Jesus left many people who were still sick and crippled. Why did He not heal everyone? Why did He not commission His disciples to heal everyone? If it were the commission of the disciples to heal everyone, why were some left unhealed, especially those who were important individuals in world evangelism? Epaphroditus was once very sick in Paul's presence. However, it was only because God wanted to spare Paul of more distress, and so He directly healed Epaphroditus (See Ph 2:25-27). Paul could not heal him. Timothy once had a stomach problem, but was not miraculously healed (1 Tm 5:23). He did not exhort Timothy to have more faith in order that God heal him. He simply directed him to use some wine for his stomach. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. However, it remained unhealed (2 Co 12:7). Paul could not heal himself. At one time, he also left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tm 4:20). By the time these incidents happened, confirming miracles were already passing away, if indeed they had not already passed away.

From the above, we would conclude that miracles **were not for personal benefit, especially for Christians**. One could also conclude that

miracles were not for the benefit of the church as a whole. We would also conclude that **it was not the purpose of the early evangelists to go about healing.** God allowed sufficient miracles to be worked in order to accomplish the purpose of confirming His messengers and the message of the gospel. Once these purposes were completed, the miracles ceased. God intends that men today emphasize the confirmed gospel. Our message today is gospel, not miracles.

Throughout this book we have emphasized that the source of encouragement and faith is the Spirit-inspired word of God. The Scriptures must be our source to build our faith. We must endeavor to follow the inspired directions of the Spirit through the word of God in order to understand and preach the gospel to the world.

We live in a time when men have grown dull of hearing the word of God. Men have moved away from God's word in their efforts to invent all sorts of religions. People have sought for mysticism in order to discover some notion or nudge from the spirit world. We must remember that there is always the threat of drifting away from a book-chapter-and-verse foundation of our faith in order to have an emotional-oriented religiosity that is better felt than told. As the

world continues into the void of ignorance of the Scriptures, people will be moved further away from the Book of God.

This is not to say that our faith must be cold of emotion and feelings. In fact, a faith that is void of emotion leaves one spiritually thirsty on the deserts of human rationalism. Our knowledge of the cross must move us to tears. Our knowledge of the empty tomb must move us to overwhelming joy. Our understanding of the present reign of King Jesus must bring comfort in times of turmoil. If there are no tears and joy, then our knowledge of the Scriptures has not passed through our heads into our hearts.

Our emotions and beliefs must be based on a knowledge of and response to the gospel. 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).*

Israel did not turn away from God by becoming less religious. The Israelites retained their religiosity. However, in their ignorance of the word of God, they created a religion after their own desires.

This same thing happens today. When Christians become ignorant of the word of God, they create a “christianity” that conforms to their own desires. When they become ignorant of the gospel, they create some system of self-sanctifying religiosity. Those who have done this think that they are Christian. They have convinced themselves that they are following Christ. They feel good in their hearts and comfortable with their relationship with Christ. However, unless we continually investigate the word of God in order to substantiate our faith in the gospel, we will go astray. We will create a religion after our own desires. Paul said that this would happen to those who do not love the truth.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4; see 2 Th 2:10-12).*

There is no fast, Spirit-inspired solution for spiritual growth and faith. We must search the word of God for

spiritual strength and guidance. As we grow in our knowledge of the incarnate Son of God who died for our sins, we will respond with a walk of gratitude.

We must not make the New Testament a dead letter. God’s word is living and active because our Savior is alive and reigning (Hb 4:12). He is the light to our way in a dark world of religious confusion. Through His word, He seeks to lead us through the confusing maze of religious error to the victory of the gospel consummation that is coming. By depending on the direction of His word, we can have hope. However, if we subject ourselves to our own inclinations, we will lead ourselves after a religion of our own desires that is founded on our own imaginations. Therefore, we must commit ourselves to the word of God. Only by doing this will we guarantee that our direction in life is directed by God. It would be good to continually remind ourselves of the words of David:

***O how I love Your law!  
It is my meditation  
all day long.***

(Ps 119:97)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

For continued study of the subject of this book, please download the following books from [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org):

- Book 16**, *The Holy Spirit And The Early Church*  
**Book 43**, *Exercising Sobriety & Self-Control*  
**Book 44**, *Experiential Religion Versus Word-Based Faith*  
**Book 76**, *Escape From Religion*.

- 
1. Franklin Camp, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts & Son Publication, 1974).
  2. H. Leo Boles, *The Holy Spirit, His Personality, Nature, Works* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1967).
  3. V. E. Howard, *Indwelling of the Holy Spirit* (Texarkana, TX: P. O. Box 5019, n.d.) (tract).
  4. Alexander Campbell, ed, *Millennial Harbinger* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1831), Vol. 11, No. 7.
  5. Proposition affirmed by J. B. Moody, a Baptist, in *The Nashville Debate*.
  6. Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*. See also, Hiscox, *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*.
  7. Affirmed by N. L. Rice, a Presbyterian, in the *Campbell-Rice Debate*.
  8. Mennonite General Conference, Aug. 27, 1959. For further study on religious views of this subject see: "Holy Ghost, *A Catholic Dictionary*, p. 232; *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 11,12; *Presbyterian Law for the Local Church*, p. 14; Mudge, *Manual of Presbyterian Law for Church Officers and Members*, p. 34; *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, "Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church," Art. 111, p. 44; *Let God Be True*, pp. 182,183.
  9. W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966).
  10. William F. Arndt & Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
  11. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Delaware: The Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.).
  12. Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978).
  13. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1964).
  14. William F. Arndt & Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
  15. T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957).
  16. Howard Winters, *The Holy Spirit* (West Jefferson, NC: Win-More Publications, 1976).
  17. J. W. Roberts, *Firm Foundation* (Austin, Tx: Firm Foundation Pub. House, Jan. 24. 1967).

18. Roy S. Lanier, *Annual Lesson Commentary on Bible School Lessons* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957).
19. E. G. Sewell, *Questions Answered* (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1921).
20. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Mission and Media of the Holy Spirit* (Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1967).
21. John A. Schep, *Baptism in the Spirit According to Scripture* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972).
22. R. Milligan, *Scheme of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co. n.d.).
23. Marion R. Fuchs, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit* (Mt. View, OK 73062: n.d.).
24. J. G. Bow, *What Baptists Believe and Why They Believe It* (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.).
25. James C. Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (New York, NY: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1917).
26. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913).
27. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The Methodist Publishing House, 1968).
28. Hugh Ireland, "Editorial," *Liahoma The Elders' Journal* (Nov. 6, 1917), Vol. 15.
29. Fred E. Rolapp, "Divine Revelation Needed" (See reference 58, Vol. 16).
30. J. M. Sjordahl, "Joseph Smith, Was He a Prophet of God?" See Ben E. Rich, *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature*.
31. Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question Box* (New York, NY: Deus Books, Paulist Press, 1962).
32. *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 35:8-10; 46:21; 38:13,14. See also Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Christ, The First Church of Christ Scientist*, Article XXX:6,9.
33. *Book of Mormon*, Mormon 9:16, Moroni 7:27,37. See also: Mormon "Articles of Faith," Article 7.

**Other books by Roger E. Dickson**  
**Download free from The Biblical Research Library,**  
**www.africainternational.org**

- |                                                               |                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Book 1: <i>Introduction To The Bible</i>                      | Book 47: <i>Fellowship And Unity Of The Organic Body</i>                |
| Book 2: <i>Biblical Interpretation</i>                        | Book 48: <i>The Cross-Centered Faith</i>                                |
| Book 3: <i>Sovereignty Of Deity</i>                           | Book 49: <i>Escape From Bondage</i>                                     |
| Book 4: <i>The Seedline Promise</i>                           | Book 50: <i>Perceptions And Postulations</i>                            |
| Book 5: <i>Finding The Priceless Pearl</i>                    | Book 51: <i>Our Faith – Our Salvation</i>                               |
| Book 6: <i>Law And Covenants</i>                              | Book 52: <i>His Grace – Our Faith</i>                                   |
| Book 7: <i>The Gospel Covenant</i>                            | Book 53: <i>The Living Sacrifice</i>                                    |
| Book 8: <i>The Gospel World View</i>                          | Book 54: <i>Committed To World Evangelism</i>                           |
| Book 9: <i>The Gospel Reign Of The Son Of God</i>             | Book 55: <i>Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ</i>                  |
| Book 10: <i>The Judgments Of God</i>                          | Book 56: <i>The World As It Is</i>                                      |
| Book 11: <i>The Church In Eternity</i>                        | Book 57: <i>The Godly Giver</i>                                         |
| Book 12: <i>God The Father</i>                                | Book 58: <i>Thirsting For Word From God</i>                             |
| Book 13: <i>God The Son</i>                                   | Book 59: <i>Following Jesus Into Glory</i>                              |
| Book 14: <i>God The Holy Spirit</i>                           | Book 60: <i>The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia</i>                     |
| Book 15: <i>The Promise Of The Holy Spirit</i>                | Book 61: <i>The Giants Among Us</i>                                     |
| Book 16: <i>The Holy Spirit And The Early Church</i>          | Book 62: <i>Dead Preachers</i>                                          |
| Book 17: <i>The Holy Spirit And The Church Today</i>          | Book 63: <i>New Creation</i>                                            |
| Book 18: <i>Satan And Demons</i>                              | Book 64: <i>Character For Christ</i>                                    |
| Book 19: <i>Gospel Leadership</i>                             | Book 65: <i>The Power Of Many As One</i>                                |
| Book 20: <i>Equipping The Saints</i>                          | Book 66: <i>The Last High Priest</i>                                    |
| Book 21: <i>Developing Character</i>                          | Book 67: <i>Survivors</i>                                               |
| Book 22: <i>The Function Of Discipleship</i>                  | Book 68: <i>Change For Growth</i>                                       |
| Book 23: <i>Gospel Evangelism</i>                             | Book 69: <i>Building Eternal Relationships</i>                          |
| Book 24: <i>Authentic Church</i>                              | Book 70: <i>Inscriptions I: Living The Word Of God</i>                  |
| Book 25: <i>The Existence Of God</i>                          | Book 71: <i>Disciples Of Divinity</i>                                   |
| Book 26: <i>The Bible And Science</i>                         | Book 72: <i>Fasting</i>                                                 |
| Book 27: <i>The Bible And Faith</i>                           | Book 73: <i>The Gospel Of God's Heart</i>                               |
| Book 28: <i>Luke's Historical Defense Of Christianity</i>     | Book 74: <i>Inscriptions II: Implementing Gospel Living</i>             |
| Book 29: <i>Sectarian Denominationalism</i>                   | Book 75: <i>It's All About Jesus</i>                                    |
| Book 30: <i>Roman Catholicism</i>                             | Book 76: <i>Escape From Religion</i>                                    |
| Book 31: <i>Justified By Works</i>                            | Book 77: <i>Rise And Fall Of Civilizations</i>                          |
| Book 32: <i>Making Disciples In A Global Community</i>        | Book 78: <i>In Search Of The First Love</i>                             |
| Book 33: <i>21<sup>st</sup> Century Restoration</i>           | Book 79: <i>Gospel Restoration</i>                                      |
| Book 34: <i>Restoration!</i>                                  | Book 80: <i>Solutions To The Problem</i>                                |
| Book 35: <i>Worship God</i>                                   | Book 81: <i>Tethered To Christ Through The Gospel</i>                   |
| Book 36: <i>Worship Freely</i>                                | Book 82: <i>The Gospel According To Hebrews</i>                         |
| Book 37: <i>One Lord With All Authority Over All Things</i>   | Book 83: <i>Gospel Teacher</i>                                          |
| Book 38: <i>The Christ-Centered Faith</i>                     | Book 84: <i>Gospel Teacher In Times Of Turmoil</i>                      |
| Book 39: <i>The Lord's Supper</i>                             | Book 85: <i>The Incarnational Journey Of God</i>                        |
| Book 40: <i>Fundamental Messages</i>                          | Book 86: <i>Angels</i>                                                  |
| Book 41: <i>Obedience To The Gospel</i>                       | Book 87: <i>Beginner's Road Map For Gospel Living Into Eternal Life</i> |
| Book 42: <i>The Music Of The Church</i>                       | Book 88: <i>Inscriptions III: Just Saying</i>                           |
| Book 43: <i>Exercising Sobriety And Self-Control</i>          | Book 89: <i>Your Gospel Journey With The Son Of God</i>                 |
| Book 44: <i>Experiential Religion Versus Word-Based Faith</i> | Book 90: <i>The Incredible Mystery</i>                                  |
| Book 45: <i>Grace Response Versus Tithing By Law</i>          |                                                                         |
| Book 46: <i>The Religious Sectarian</i>                       |                                                                         |

Plus commentaries on all the books of the Bible in the  
*Dickson Teacher's Bible*, at [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**