

# How God's Word Comes to Us

Exploring Current Issues Conference

Mark Mayberry

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## Introduction

“God spoke to me and told me. . .” is another statement we have heard, and even by some brethren. Is this claim true? What are some of the things people claimed God told them in these quiet moments? Is the Holy Spirit guiding us to new truth, or is He giving special illumination to the truths revealed in the Bible?

In preparing for this assignment, I approached it from a different standpoint. I asked, “How is the Holy Spirit described in different sections of Sacred Scripture? What was His function in the Old Testament? What roles did the Spirit fulfill in the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles?”

I avoided simply relying upon my notes from previous studies, but examined the subject afresh. In the end, I came to the same basic conclusions as I previously held, but from a new perspective. So, let’s see what the biblical text says—observing patterns that occur, looking for consistencies, dealing with differences, etc.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is an active member of the triune Godhead—functioning in perfect harmony with God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Son.

What is His primary function? The Holy Spirit serves as the active agent of revelation—searching the mind of God, and revealing those thoughts that God chooses to share with mankind. Obviously, the decision of *what* is shared and *when* it is shared belongs exclusively to God:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law (Deut. 29:29).

## The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

In the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (which is my preferred translation), there are only three references to the “Holy Spirit” (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11).

A Bible search for “Spirit of God” yields 12 results in 12 verses (Gen. 1:2; Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20; Job 33:4; Ezek. 11:24).

A Bible search for “Spirit of the Lord” yields 24 results in 24 verses (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6; 16:13, 14; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kings 2:16; 2 Chron. 18:23; 20:14; Isa. 11:2; 40:13; 61:1; 63:14; Ezek. 11:5; 37:1; Micah 2:7; 3:8)

A Bible search for “His Spirit” yields 5 results in 5 verses (Num. 11:29; Ps. 106:33; Isa. 34:16; 48:16; Zech. 7:12).

A Bible search for “My Spirit” yields 12 results in 12 verses (Gen. 6:3; Isa. 30:1; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Haggai 2:5; Zech. 4:6).

A Bible search for “Your Spirit” yields 3 results in 3 verses (Neh. 9:30; Ps. 104:30; 139:7).

A Bible search for “Spirit” NOT (“Holy Spirit” OR “Spirit of God” OR “Spirit of the Lord” OR “His Spirit” OR “My Spirit” OR “Your Spirit”) yields 18 results in 17 verses (Num. 11:17, 25, 26; 27:18; 1 Chron. 12:18; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 143:10; Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1; 43:5; Zech. 12:10; Mal. 2:15).

As we consider many of these passages, the following patterns become apparent:

## **Active in Creation**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 44:24). Jesus Christ was the active agent of creation (Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:5-6). As a part of the triune Godhead, the Holy Spirit took part in the physical creation (Gen. 1:2).

In the beginning, **God created the heavens and the earth** (Gen. 1:1).

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, **"I, the LORD, am the maker of all things,** stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone (Isa. 44:24).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **For by Him all things were created,** both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:15-17).

For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and **one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him** (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and **the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters** (Gen. 1:2).

They all wait for You to give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good. You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to their dust. **You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;** and You renew the face of the ground (Ps. 104:27-30).

## **Active in Holiness**

As a member of the triune Godhead, the Holy Spirit experiences grief at man's sin (Isa. 63:7-14, esp. vv. 10 & 14).

I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has granted them according to His compassion and according to the abundance of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, "Surely, they are My people, sons who will not deal falsely." So He became their Savior. In all their affliction, He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. But **they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.** Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? **Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them,** Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not

stumble; **as the cattle which go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.** So You led Your people, to make for Yourself a glorious name (Isa. 63:7-14).

The Holy Spirit withdraws His fellowship from those who actively engage in sin (Ps. 51:10-13, esp. v. 11; cf. Isa. 59:1-2).

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. **Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.** Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You (Ps. 51:10-13).

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. **But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear** (Isa. 59:1-2).

## Active in Revelation

As a part of the triune Godhead, the Holy Spirit was active in revelation, performing mighty signs and revealing divine truth.

### Performing Mighty Signs

Consider the example of Othniel (Judg. 3:9-11).

When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. **The Spirit of the LORD** came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died. (Judges 3:9-11).

Consider the example of Samson (Judg. 14:5-6).

Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him. **The Spirit of the LORD** came upon him

mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. (Judges 14:5-6).

## **Revealing Divine Truth**

Throughout the Scriptures, in both the Old Testament and the New, God revealed Himself through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

But just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” For to us **God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God** (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

Reflect upon the summary statement offered in 2 Samuel 23:1-2 concerning David:

Now these are the last words of David. David, the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, “**The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue**” (2 Sam. 23:1-2).

By inspiration, David recorded not only his many Psalms but also the pattern of the temple (1 Chron. 28:11-12, 19).

Then **David gave to his son Solomon the plan** of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; and **the plan of all that he had in mind**, for the courts of the house of the LORD, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated things; (1 Chron. 28:11-12).

“**All this,**” said David, “**the LORD made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern**” (1 Chron. 28:19).

Psalms 143, a Davidic “Prayer for Deliverance and Guidance,” closes with this entreaty:

**Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.** For the sake of Your name, O LORD, revive me. In Your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble. And in Your lovingkindness, cut off my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant (Ps. 143:10-12).

When the remnant returned to the land from foreign captivity, Ezra and Nehemiah labored together to set God's people on a proper spiritual path. Ezra read from the Law, the people confessed their sins, and the Levites said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!" (Neh. 9:5). After reviewing Israel's history of disobedience and rebellion, they praised God for His steadfast love for Israel: "**You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets. . .**" (Neh. 9:26-31, esp. v. 30).

But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who had admonished them so that they might return to You, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore, You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, but when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors. But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore, You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, and admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them, he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not listen. However, **You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear.** Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and compassionate God (Neh. 9:26-31).

Among the many Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, note Psalm 110, in which David foreshadows the dominance God would bestow upon Israel's coming King:

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew. The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore, He will lift up His head. (Ps. 110:1-7).

When Jesus cited Psalm 110:1, our Lord attributed this prophecy to the Holy Spirit:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, “THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare, from that day on, to ask Him another question. (Matt. 22:41-46, esp. vv. 43-45).

Finally, ponder the prophecies recorded by Isaiah which affirm that the Messiah would possess the Holy Spirit in a unique measure (Isa. 11:1-5; 61:1-3).

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. **The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.** And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness, He will judge the poor and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips, He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist (Isa. 11:1-5).



**The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD** and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified (Isa. 61:1-3).

## Summary

We serve a God who is powerful. He created the physical universe, and can create in us a clean heart. The Holy Spirit participated in this process.

We serve a God who is pure. If we hope to share fellowship with Him, we must partake in His holiness. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit as much as it does the Father and the Son.

We serve a God who speaks to His people through His precepts. The Holy Spirit guided the inspired writers of the Old Testament era to record the history of their times, and to foreshadow future events, including the coming of the Messiah.

## The Holy Spirit in the Gospels

A Bible search in the Gospels for “Holy Spirit” in the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* yields 25 results in 25 verses (Matt. 1:18, 20; 3:11; 12:32; 28:19; Mark 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11; Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25, 26; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; John 1:33; 14:26; 20:22).

A Bible search in the Gospels for “Spirit of truth” yields 3 results in 3 verses (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

A Bible search in the Gospels for “the Helper” yields 3 results in 3 verses (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

A Bible search in the Gospels for “Spirit of God” yields 2 results in 2 verses (Matt. 3:16; 12:28).

A Bible search in the Gospels for “Spirit NOT (Holy OR of God OR of truth)” yields 16 results in 15 verses (Matt. 4:1; 10:20; 12:18, 31; 22:43; Mark 1:10, 12; Luke 2:27; 4:14, 18; John 1:32; 3:6, 8; 6:63; 7:39).

## **The Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ**

### **His Birth**

The Holy Spirit was involved in the birth of Jesus Christ: the Child who had been conceived in Mary’s womb was of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35).

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18).

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20).

The angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason, the holy Child shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

### **His Baptism**

The Holy Spirit appeared at Jesus’s baptism, descending in bodily form like a dove and alighting upon Him (Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-33).

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased (Mark 1:10-11).

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased (Luke 3:21-22).

John testified saying, I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' (John 1:32-33).

### **His Temptation**

The Holy Spirit was present at Jesus's temptation, leading Him into the wilderness (Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2).

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1).

Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him (Mark 1:12-13).

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry (Luke 4:1-2).

### **His Ministry**

Jesus is described as being full of the Holy Spirit and functioning under the influence of the Spirit (Luke 4:1). This seemingly parallels the description of Jesus in John's gospel as sharing full fellowship with the Godhead (John 3:34-35; cf. 10:30).

**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was led around by [or under the influence of; literally, in] the Spirit in the wilderness (Luke 4:1).

**For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure** [literally, because He does not give the Spirit by measure]. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand (John 3:34-35).

I and the Father are one (John 10:30).

He ministered in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14-15).

And Jesus returned to Galilee **in the power of the Spirit**, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all (Luke 4:14-15).

In a Sabbath service at Nazareth, Jesus quoted from a Messianic prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 61:1ff) and subsequently said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21, esp. vv. 18 & 21).

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, **THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME**, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD. And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:16-21).

Later, in the midst of His ministry, when Jesus's enemies conspired against Him, our Lord withdrew from there (thus defusing the situation) and fulfilling a similar prophecy from Isaiah 42 (cf. Matt. 12:18-21, esp. v. 18).

BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; **I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM**, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. A BATTERED REED

HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE (Matt. 12:18-21).

Responding to the absurd accusation leveled against Him by the Pharisees —“This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.”— Jesus rather affirmed that He performed miracles by the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28).

But if **I cast out demons by the Spirit of God**, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matt. 12:28).

When the seventy returned from their training mission, Jesus sought to re-channel their exuberant joy. Afterward, He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, praising God for their child-like faith:

At that very time **He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit**, and said, I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight (Luke 10:21).

## **The Holy Spirit and Mortal Men**

### **John the Baptist and His Parents**

The Holy Spirit was active in John the Baptist and his parents (Luke 1:15, 41, 67).

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and **he will be filled with the Holy Spirit** while yet in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15).

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and **Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit** (Luke 1:41).

And his father **Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied**, saying: (Luke 1:67).

### **Aged Simeon**

The Holy Spirit was active in aged Simeon (Luke 2:25-32, esp. vv. 25, 26, 27).

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and **the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple;** and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, **and said,** Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:25-32).

## **The Disciples of Christ**

### ***General Application***

Generally speaking, the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of Christ's disciples.

The Spirit gives life to believers as they believe and obey the gospel message (John 6:60-63, esp. v. 63).

Therefore, many of His disciples, when they heard this said, This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it? But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life** (John 6:60-63).

The Holy Spirit is given (at least in a general sense) to those who demonstrate a spirit of reliance (Luke 11:9-13, esp. v. 13).

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? **If you then, being evil,**

**know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?** (Luke 11:9-13).

As reflected in Matthew's account of the great commission, disciples are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20, esp. v. 19).

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

### ***Specific Application***

The Holy Spirit was specifically active in the lives of Christ's chosen apostles.

The Spirit would provide comfort/help in times of trial and tribulation by miraculously providing them with a reasoned defense (Matt. 10:16-20, esp. v. 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12).

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. **For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you** (Matt. 10:16-20).

When they arrest you and hand you over, **do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit** (Mark 13:11).

When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for **the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say** (Luke 12:11-12).

The Holy Spirit would provide comfort/help to the twelve by serving as an agent of divine revelation, providing them with a Helper (Greek *Paracletos*, i.e., one called alongside to help; or Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor), by whom they would be granted an accurate remembrance of Christ's teaching. Additionally, the Spirit would guide them to a full revelation of yet undisclosed truths (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:13).

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may be with you forever; that is **the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

**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 that I said to you** (John 14:26).

**When the Helper comes**, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, **He will testify about Me, and you will testify also**, because you have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26-27).

**But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come** (John 16:13).

**These promises anticipated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.**

John the Baptist called his countrymen to repent and prepare for the coming kingdom, saying He who is coming after me. . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-17).

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:11-12).



And he was preaching, and saying, After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit** (Mark 1:7-8).

Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, John answered and said to them all, As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:15-17).

While John spoke in generic terms about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, near the end of His ministry, Jesus provided a fuller explanation and more specific fulfillment of this promise—namely applying it to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:6-8).

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. **And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high**" (Luke 24:45-49).

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; **but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

A recognition of this chronology helps us understand and interpret other anticipatory statements in the fourth gospel (John 7:37-39, esp. v. 39; 20:21-23).

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” **But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified** (John 7:37-39).

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained”** (John 20:21-23).

## The Holy Spirit in the Epistles

In this section, we attempt to categorize the occurrences of the “Spirit” in the epistles, under the following headings: Revelation, Ratification, Relationship, and Renewal. In my judgment, the vast majority of passages that refer to the Holy Spirit fall into one or more of these categories.

### Revelation

Paul said, “The Spirit Himself *testifies* with our spirit, that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). The key thought of this verse, at least in relation to our present study, is the introductory phrase: “The Spirit Himself *testifies*. . .” He bears witness with our spirit—offering unified testimony. This same idea occurs in the following chapter. Paul’s conscience and testimony united with the inspired message of the Holy Spirit regarding his sorrow over the lost state of his fellow Israelites (Rom. 9:1).

1 Corinthians 2 describes of the nature of divine revelation. God revealed His mind and thoughts through His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:10). We cannot know the thoughts of man, much less the thoughts of God, apart from some act of self-disclosure. Thus, we are dependent upon the revelation of God’s mind by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11). Paul affirmed that he (along with the other inspired apostles and prophets) had received the Spirit of God, so that they (and, by extension, those who believe and obey the gospel message) may know the things that God has freely given to His children (1 Cor. 2:12). The gospel message does not originate in

human wisdom; rather, inspired men are taught by the Holy Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. The Holy Spirit was active throughout the entire process of revelation—from the reception of the inspired message to its recording with pen and parchment (1 Cor. 2:13). In contrast, the natural man (i.e., one who is carnal-minded) rejects the inspired message, counting it as foolishness, because he is spiritually undiscerning (1 Cor. 2:14).

Along with the other apostles and prophets, Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit in revealing the mystery of Christ (which had previously been hidden) but has now been made known—and is understandable to those who read it with open and honest hearts (Eph. 3:3-5).

Paul’s parallel statements in Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16 help us understand that we are “filled with the Spirit” when “the word of Christ” richly dwells within us.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but *be filled with the Spirit*, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:18-19).

*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16).

Through meditation and study, the word of God permeates our hearts, molding our minds, and shaping our lives. In offering his judgment on the course that a widow woman should follow (i.e., to remarry or remain single), Paul said, “In my opinion, she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 7:40). Paul’s personal opinions were formed by his knowledge of God’s word. The same should be true of us as well.

### **Contrasted with the Law**

Although the law of Moses was glorious, it could not solve the sin problem, and was thus considered a ministry of condemnation. Since the gospel of Christ provides forgiveness and reconciliation, it is counted a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:7-9).

Through dying on the cross, Jesus bore the curse of sin, and paid the price of our redemption—so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, and we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, i.e., salvation (Gal. 3:13-14).

As the writer of Hebrews contrasts the Old and New Covenants, he described the layout of the tabernacle (with its inner and outer sections) and the usage of each. While the priests continually entered the outer tabernacle (i.e., the Holy Place), only the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. Accordingly,

The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing. . . (Heb. 9:8-9).

The Holy Spirit guided the Old Testament prophets to foreshadow the establishment of a New Covenant:

And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM” (Heb. 10:15-16).

### **Contrasted with Error**

Defending himself against the unjust charges of the Judaizers, Paul affirmed his faithfulness and fidelity, in sacrifice, suffering, and in proclaiming and practicing the word of truth—which came through the agency of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 6:6-7).

Criticizing the Corinthians for their gullibility, Paul said: “For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully” (2 Cor. 11:4). He used reverse psychology: mocking them for having uncritically accepted error, when they should have openly embraced the truth.

Unlike the Judaizers, who trusted in their selective obedience to the works of the Law (i.e., circumcision), Christians submit to the guidance of the Spirit (along with the other members of the Godhead) by hearing with faith (Gal. 3:2-3). Yes, the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament, but the

Christian dispensation began with a dramatic display of divine power. The working of the Holy Spirit during the first century was connected with the institution of a new and better covenant (Gal. 3:5).

In contrast with those who sought justification by meritorious law-keeping (which was impossible because of the reality of sin), disciples of Christ walk by faith—rooted in the revelation that came through the Spirit and actuated by love (Gal. 5:4-6).

While the Judaizers promoted a false circumcision, Paul declares that faithful disciples are the true circumcision, “who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:2-3). What does it mean to “worship in the Spirit of God?” The Philippians worshiped according to the New Testament pattern.

Foreshadowing future apostasy, Paul says, “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith. . .” (1 Tim. 4:1). In other words, they will depart from biblical teaching, commit the common sin of adding to, subtracting from, and otherwise changing the word of God.

Despite the assertions of Calvinism, apostasy is not an impossibility. One can become a Christian, share in the benefits and blessings of salvation (which include becoming partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God), but subsequently fall away from the faith (Heb. 6:4-6).

We must not gullibly believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God. The way believers can distinguish between truth and error is to compare a given teaching to the revealed word of God:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

### **Reflected in the Gospel**

In obedience to the gospel message (which was revealed through the agency of the Spirit), we are baptized into one body (the church) and made to drink from the water of life (which, again, was made manifest to the inspired apostles and prophets by the Spirit) (1 Cor 12:13).

Paul affirmed, “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess. 1:5).

In describing the mystery of godliness, Paul declares that Jesus was “revealed in the flesh” and “vindicated in the Spirit.” Notice the contrast drawn between “flesh” and “spirit:” The first statement affirms his genuine humanity, while the second acknowledges his complete holiness (1 Tim. 3:16).

As the Old Testament prophets foreshadowed the coming of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit guided those who preached the gospel to fully reveal God’s eternal plan and purpose (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Fulfilled prophecy is a foundation of Christian faith which cannot be explained apart from divine intervention. Thus, Peter said, “we have the prophetic word made more sure,” which believers must hear and heed. In describing the nature of inspiration, he added, “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

### **Reflected in Faithful Preaching**

Through maintaining proper dispositions and doctrinal purity, believers endeavor to preserve “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-6, esp. v. 3). Included among the foundational doctrines of Christianity is a recognition of the nature of the Godhead: There is one Spirit (i.e., Source of revelation). . . one Lord (i.e., Possessor of all authority). . . one God and Father (i.e., Object of Worship).

The Christian soldier is armed with a single offensive weapon: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Therefore, let us trust in its power to transform lives:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

In parallelism that is reminiscent of Old Testament proverbs, Paul exhorted Timothy to “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me. . . [and] guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure

which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:13-14). The standard of sound words that has been revealed through the agency of the Holy Spirit (i.e., the gospel of Christ) must be retained, guarded, and treasured.

### **Reflected in Faithful Practice**

Those who live in harmony with divine revelation will not be guilty of quenching the Spirit or despising prophetic utterances (1 Thess. 5:19-20). Rather, we must heed the gospel message, which was confirmed by eyewitness testimony, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:1-4, esp. v. 4).

In the Old Testament, God spoke through Moses, the prophets, and the authors of wisdom literature. The Holy Spirit continues to speak through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Faithfulness is required in all generations.

**Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS”** (Heb. 3:7-8).

### **Ratification**

Signs and wonders serve to confirm heaven’s message. This was true of Jesus (John 3:1-2), the apostles (Acts 4:13-22), and those disciples who had received spiritual gifts: “They went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:1-2).

But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:15-16).

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

Jesus Christ is both the Son of Man (born a descendant of David) and the Son of God (as is evidenced by His resurrection and holiness). In this context, “the Spirit of holiness” describes Jesus’s personal purity or His perfect unity with the Godhead, either of which declares His deity (Rom. 1:3-4).

The signs and wonders Paul performed were by the power of God’s Spirit, and confirmed the authenticity of his message (Rom. 15:19). His preaching was not rooted in rhetoric, but in a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor 2:4).

This principle also applied to the partial empowerment that came through spiritual gifts. As Paul begins his extended discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he affirms that the Spirit of God controls the message that a gifted individual communicates: No one speaking under the influence of the Spirit would say, “Jesus is accursed/anathema” (which is a false statement); so likewise, no one was able to say, “Jesus is Lord” (which is a true statement) except by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). In other words, a proper understanding of Jesus’s position and power is made possible through the working of the Holy Spirit, who reveals and confirms divine truths.

In the age of New Testament miracles, wrought by the apostles (who received the baptismal measure of the Spirit) and those upon whom the apostles laid their hands, there were diversities of gifts, all of which came from the same Spirit—and served to either reveal or confirm heaven’s message (1 Cor 12:4-11).

## **Relationship**

Believers share a relationship, not only with one another, but also with the triune Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all active in man’s salvation. Paul thus exhorted the Romans, who were united as brethren through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with the apostle in offering up prayers to God on his behalf (Rom. 15:30).



Similarly, Paul closed his second letter to the Corinthians by citing the combined effort of the Godhead as they work together for our salvation: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14).

Salvation is made possible through the combined work of the Godhead (Eph. 2:17-18). The plan of salvation, conceived in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, was divinely implemented through collective effort:

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13-14).

In the salutation of his first epistle, Peter reminds his readers that, although they resided as aliens scattered throughout Asia Minor, they are God’s chosen people—made so by the collective activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

### **Reflected through Spiritual Blessings**

God’s love is poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that hath been given to us (Rom. 5:5). Paul also added, “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10), and “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

The Spirit helps in our weakness and prayers—making intercession for the saints with unutterable groanings (Rom. 8:26-27). In other words, when our prayers are consistent with the revelation of the Spirit, we benefit from the Spirit’s intercession. Thus, we must pray at all times in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18).

The Spirit brings manifold blessings: fellowship (Phil. 2:1), love (Col. 1:8), and joy (1 Thess. 1:6). If we suffer for the cause of Christ, it is because we have chosen to love God and follow the truth. While sacrificial discipleship carries a cost, it also bestows a blessing:

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Pet. 4:14).

Believers enjoy abounding hope in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13). Paul trusted that he would be delivered from Roman imprisonment through prayers offered by the Philippians and “the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:18-19).

### **Reflected through Shared Fellowship**

We are in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in us (Rom. 8:9). If the Spirit of God the Father dwells in us, then He who raised Christ from the dead will quicken our dying bodies, through His Spirit dwelling in us (Rom. 8:11).

In a context where Paul describes God’s people collectively, referring to the church as His field and building (v. 9), he also declares, “you are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Cor. 3:16). So, likewise, from an individual standpoint, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in us, which we have from God, and we are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19).

In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul describes the church as a kingdom (you are citizens), an expansive family (you are God’s household), and also a building/temple (in which you are built together) as a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). He prayed that the Ephesians would be “strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith, in order that they would understand and apply the concept of agape love (Eph. 3:16-17).

### **Reflected through Sealing**

God the Father has established, anointed, and sealed us in Christ Jesus, and has given us the Spirit as a pledge in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). In the introduction of the Ephesian epistle, Paul describes the secure present and glorious future belonging to those who hear and believe the message of truth: “You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13-14).

## **Reflected through Sanctification**

Those who refuse to possess their vessels in sanctification and honor by pursuing a path of impurity are rejecting, not man, but God “who gives His Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thess. 4:8). Those who submit to God’s calling are counted among the elect—whose salvation is secured “through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

## **Reflected through Submission**

Christ commands us to love one another. If we keep His commandments, we abide in Him, and He in us. Moreover, “We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:23-24). If we live in harmony with God’s revealed word, then we abide in Him and He in us, “because He has given us of His Spirit.” In other words, our fellowship with God is contingent upon being obedient to the Sacred Scriptures, which are given by inspiration (1 John 4:12-13).

## **Damaged/Destroyed by Sin**

Like the other members of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is a distinctive personality who cares about us, and is deeply grieved by our sins (Eph. 4:30). Through willful rebellion, one may incur severer punishment because he tramples under foot the Son of God, disdains His shed blood, and insults the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). When the people of God show an affinity for the world, they are guilty of spiritual adultery. Since the church is the bride of Christ, it should not surprise us that the Lord desires our exclusive devotion:

Do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?” (Jas. 4:4-5).

## **Renewal**

There is now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1). The Spirit provides a law of life in Christ Jesus that sets us free from the law of sin and of death (Rom. 8:2). The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). Those who live according to the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5), resulting in life and peace (Rom. 8:6). If we live according to the flesh,

we will die, but if, by the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body, we shall live (Rom. 8:13). As God's adopted children, we have the first-fruit of the Spirit, and longingly anticipate the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23).

The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Paul was hopeful that his readers would respond favorably to his message, so that his priestly offering of the Gentiles would be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16).

Our salvation from sin is made possible as we obey the gospel plan of salvation—by which we are sanctified and declared righteous, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11). As the gospel is inscribed on the fleshy tablets of our heart, it is manifest that we are a letter of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God—through whom the message was revealed and confirmed (2 Cor. 3:3).

In contrast with Moses (whose face was veiled after descending from Sinai), and the ancient Israelites (whose hearts were hardened after having received the Law), when a person (possessing a good and honest heart) turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away, and the truth is clearly revealed:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Those who walk by the Spirit will not pursue carnal lifestyles that are diametrically opposed to the spiritual emphasis of the New Covenant. Furthermore, those who are led by the Spirit are not under the Law (Gal. 5:16-18). In contrast with the works of the flesh (all of which are degrading and destructive), the fruit of the Spirit flourishes in those who manifest the mind of Christ. Therefore, let us live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). Eternity hangs in the balance: He who sows to the flesh will reap corruption, while he who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life (Gal. 6:8).

We find forgiveness, not through meritorious works, or self-devised schemes, but by humbly submitting to God's plan of redemption:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5-6).

In contrast with worldly minded individuals who cause division and are devoid of the Spirit, faithful disciples must be diligently devoted to building themselves up in their most holy faith, and “*praying in the Holy Spirit*” (Jude 19-20).

## Conclusion

Having examined ways in which the Holy Spirit was active in the Old and New Testaments, we conclude by addressing the following:

Some brethren will say, “God spoke to me, and told me...” Are such claims true?

In the Old Testament era, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets. In the New Testament era, God speaks to us through His son, Jesus Christ, and by extension, through the inspired apostles and prophets. However, in the present post-apostolic era, God no longer communicates with us directly.

Jesus possessed the Spirit without measure, while the apostles received the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. Certain disciples received the laying on of hands by the apostles, by which they were granted different gifts of the spirit—which served to reveal or confirm heaven’s message.

Interestingly, the Old Testament anticipated a time when prophecy would end (Zech. 13:1-6). Of course, this would apply to false prophets, but some brethren believe that it potentially parallels Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, which anticipated an end to the age of miracles:

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will

know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Paul's aforementioned contrast between "the perfect" and "the partial" involves revelation. The age of direct communication from God to man would end with the completion of the New Testament. While there were a diversity of spiritual gifts, they could be broadly classified as methods of revelation and miracles of confirmation. The Corinthians were bickering over temporary phenomena that were only intended for the infancy of the church.

When the process of revelation was complete (i.e, when the New Testament had been fully delivered and disseminated), then the partial measures (i.e., spiritual gifts, which included various forms of direct divine communication) would end. When the last apostle died, the means of transmitting spiritual gifts was lost. When the last individual died who had received a spiritual gift through the apostolic laying on of hands, then the age of miracles ended. Nevertheless, by this point, the process of revelation would have been complete.

How does God communicate with us today? He speaks to us through His word. Accordingly, we heed the warning of Jesus (John 5:39-40), and harken to the apostolic command (2 Tim. 2:15).

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life (John 5:39-40).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

However, we should never presumptuously think that our subjective desires are the equivalent of God's revealed word. Many times, I've pondered the path that I should take. By prayerfully meditating upon biblical principles that would relate to the issue under consideration, I chose a path that seemed superior to the others. However, this reflects the power of the word, not some mysterious personal prompting of the Spirit. I would never claim that God was speaking directly to me, separate and apart from the word, using some "Better felt than told" blather to justify my position.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

What role do subjective feelings play in our Christian lives? Do they supersede Sacred Scripture, or must they be subordinate to the same? The answer lies in Paul's famous declaration:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" (Rom. 1:16-17).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, revealed through the agency of the inspired apostles and prophets, is our objective standard. We must be obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7), stand firm in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13), continue in the faith (Col. 1:23), and contend earnestly for the faith—recognizing that it was once for all (i.e., one time for all time) handed down to the saints (Jude 3).

However, this objective standard must be internalized. Like the Corinthians, our discipleship is evident as the gospel message is inscribed upon the fleshy tablets of the heart (2 Cor. 3:1-3), and we are thus transformed into the image of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

In Romans 1:16-17, the expression, “from faith to faith,” is key—*the faith* must become *our faith*. Through diligently studying and consistently applying the gospel (i.e., the objective divine standard of revealed truth given through the apostles and prophets), we develop our own personal subjective belief system (i.e., “my faith”). Of course, our personal convictions are subject to revision or rejection—as we develop a better understanding of God’s word. However, the objective truth of God’s word is never subject to alteration or change.

Additionally, let us exercise caution in asserting that God directs us in some manner separate and apart from Sacred Scripture. Of course, we believe in the power of prayer (Jas. 5:16-18), and divine providence (Dan. 4:17).

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit (Jas. 5:16-18).

This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men (Dan. 4:17).

However, we should avoid authoritatively asserting, “This is that. . .” (cf. Acts 2:15-16)—even in situations where it seems obvious that God is acting. When Mordecai exhorted Esther to seize the moment and use her influence on behalf of the Jewish people, he said:

Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And *who knows* whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this? (Esther 4:13-14).

In writing to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, the runaway slave, Paul said:

For *perhaps* he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Phile. 15-16).



Sadly, many Christians today claim to be led by the Holy Spirit through an inner voice, strong emotions, or circumstantial events, etc. In reality, their subjective approach is no different from the denominational “Better Felt Than Told” rationalizations of yesteryear. Even today, this approach has been adopted by waffling preachers who lead weak (and easily manipulated) members down the primrose path of apostasy.

Consider the example of Rick Atchley, pulpit minister for Richland Hills church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. In an article entitled, “The Holy Spirit and the Conscience of Man,” Heath Rogers relates the event as follows:

In 2006, the Richland Hills church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas, made “history” by incorporating the use of instrumental music in their worship. In a sermon delivered on December 10, 2006, preacher Rick Atchley made the following statement regarding one of his reasons for making this departure from the New Testament pattern for worship:

Right there at that spot about 1994 the Holy Spirit said to me in the middle of my sermon, “and that’s what you and all the preachers like you were doing, who haven’t for years believed that the worship of God with instruments is wrong. But you continue by your silence to let people think it’s wrong, to allow the body to be disrupted, and you do so under the plea, ‘Well, we’re just maintaining peace.’ But that’s not peace; that’s cowardice.” I knew then the day would come I’d have to teach this lesson” (Dave Miller, *Richland Hills & Instrumental Music, A Plea to Reconsider*, page 5).

Atchley claims the Holy Spirit spoke directly to him as he was preaching a sermon in 1994. Despite being slow on the uptake—It took him a dozen years to respond!—he pompously presented himself bold and courageous:

“My e-mail is flooded with messages from elders and preachers across the country encouraging this church and praising us for the decisions we’ve made,” Atchley told the church. “I know this: If our fellowship stays on the course we’re on, our future looks bleak. Someone has got to be a leader” (Rick Atchley, as quoted by Bobby Ross, Jr. in *The Christian Chronicle*).

In the seventeen years that have passed since Atchley’s infamous declaration, many others who formerly stood for the truth have adopted the same rationale for adding to, subtracting from, and otherwise altering the biblical

pattern for the work, worship, and organization of the church. How should faithful Christians respond to such claims? Should we “go along to get along?” No. Let us manifest the courage and conviction of Isaiah:

When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (Isa. 8:19-20).

In closing, please consider three biblical principles that will guide us through such troubling times:

**Sacred Scripture repeatedly warns us not to trust our hearts (Prov. 16:25; 28:26; Jer. 17:9).**

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Prov. 16:25).

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered (Prov. 28:26).

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9).

**God does not contradict Himself, but remains consistent. This applies not only to His person but also to His precepts (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; 2 Cor. 1:15-22).**

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; as He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num. 23:19).

For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore, you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (Mal. 3:6).

In this confidence, I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea. Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of

God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge (2 Cor. 1:15-22).

**Guarding against error, we must not be led away by strange teaching, rather, let us test the spirits, to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (Heb. 13:7-9; 1 John 4:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:19-22).**

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited (Heb. 13:7-9).

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

## Sources

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