

The Holy Spirit (part one)

The Bible tells us that there is one God:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.¹

There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.²

This one God consists of three persons. Jesus Christ said this:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,³

The Holy Spirit may be the most difficult to understand of the three. In this discussion I would like to concentrate on the work of the Holy Spirit in communicating truth. The apostle Paul wrote:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"—

but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

"For who has known the mind of the Lord
that he may instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ.⁴

We can learn many things from this passage of scripture. First, some insight into the use of the word "spirit" the man's spirit within him knows his thoughts, in the same way the spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. The apostle Paul claims to be speaking words taught by the spirit of God rather than by human wisdom. In fact he goes on to say man without the aid of the Holy Spirit can not see

¹ Deut 6:4

² Eph 4:4-6

³ Matt 28:19

⁴ 1 Cor 2:1-16

or accept these spiritual truths. We understand scripture as coming from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of instruction:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.⁵

Notice in the following passage Jesus Christ quoting from Psalm 110 indicating that the words David wrote came from the Holy Spirit:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." "

David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.⁶

The apostle Peter quoting from Psalms 69 and 109 also indicates the Holy Spirit was speaking through David (in this instance about Judas):

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus--he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

"For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms,

"May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,'

and,

"May another take his place of leadership."⁷

Peter also wrote:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.⁸

The Holy Spirit revealed for us the mind of God using the writing of various individuals at various times. We know the identity of some of these writers but some we do not. The identity of the writer is less important than the divine inspiration behind all scripture. Jesus Christ and his apostles spoke with confidence concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in creating scripture. How can we have that same confidence today? First, the Holy Spirit is promised as a gift to each person who believes the promise and follows the instruction from God:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call."⁹

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.¹⁰

⁵ 2 Tim 3:16-17

⁶ Mark 12:35-37

⁷ Acts 1:15-17, 20

⁸ 2 Pet 1:20-21

⁹ Acts 2:38-39

¹⁰ Eph 1:13-14

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.¹¹

Finally, just as the authority of Christ was underscored by various miracles, additional assistance was given to the apostles by the Holy Spirit in the form of various miraculous gifts of the Spirit to underscore their authority and build up the early church. The apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth includes various miraculous gifts in this list of manifestations of the Spirit given to them as believers:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.¹²

Included in the preceding list is the ability to distinguish between spirits. This would enable believers to know which of the various writings circulating during that early church period were indeed inspired by the Holy Spirit. We can have confidence that the Spirit successfully completed the written word and instruction for us in that period. These miraculous gifts of the Spirit were conferred on believers by the laying on of the apostle's hands. Next we will look at a passage from Acts chapter eight that indicates this. The apostles (individuals specifically commissioned by Christ) were the only ones who could pass on this power so these gifts would be available to the church for a limited time. Do not confuse the miraculous gifts of the Spirit with the gift of the Spirit that is promised to all believers upon baptism. Much confusion has arisen over this distinction. So read carefully. Acts 2:38 is talking about the gift promised to all believers while this passage from Acts chapter eight is talking about miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Notice the need for an apostle for this to take place:

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."¹³

¹¹ Rom 5:5

¹² 1 Cor 12:7-11

¹³ Acts 8:9-24

Many today have the false understanding that church councils decided which writings would be included in the Bible. This argument is used to question the authority of scripture. During the time of the early church the Holy Spirit was at work causing the creation and assembling together of the various writings we now know as the New Testament. The canon of scripture was understood by the believers at that time through the Holy Spirit and (for example) only ratified by the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. An examination of the writings of believers that preceded this event can help you to understand this. You can see the process unfolding as the churches accepted the writings as scripture. For example look at Eusebius. The Roman Emperor Constantine, upon his conversion, commissioned Eusebius to assemble fifty Bibles. This was many years before the Council of Carthage. These Bibles contained the same 66 books that we today also view as Holy Scripture. Our confidence does not rest on man's wisdom it rests on God's power demonstrated through the Holy Spirit.

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