

~ LED BY THE SPIRIT ~

Jeremiah cried, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Paul wrote, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). He told the Galatians, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Galatians 5:16, 18). Peter said, "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 1:20).

Although "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16), this article will focus on the revelation of the Spirit in the New Testament. How did the Holy Spirit work in the first century and how does He work today in conversion and edification?

How the Spirit Leads

Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). Later, He said, "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" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit accomplished this work during the lifetime of the apostles. He is not bringing to our remembrance things we heard Jesus say, nor guiding us into all truth through inspiration, as He did the apostles and other Spirit-guided men. Paul affirmed: "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. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:9-13, NASV). The things of God are not accessible through the senses of man. Before the Spirit revealed the gospel message, no eye could see, no ear could hear and no heart could understand God's plan, but after the Spirit revealed it, through the apostles and prophets, every eye can see, every ear can hear and every heart can understand what God has prepared for those who love Him. This is the only way we can know the mind of God.

When Jesus sent out the seventy He said, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). Men cannot reject the word of God without rejecting the God of the word! Later, the message that was inspired in men was written. Paul said, "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:3-5). The message of the Spirit was first

known only through hearing, later it was learned by both hearing and reading, and finally was known only through reading what was written by inspiration of the Spirit.

The Spirit and Conversion

Jesus promised the apostles, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). About ten days later, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they “began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Peter began his sermon by saying “heed my words” (verse 14), then he quoted the words of Joel and said “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (verse 22). He concluded that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ. “Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (verse 37). They were told to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (verse 38). “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized...” (verse 41). Their conversion was a result of hearing and obeying the word of the Spirit.

The first Gentile convert, Cornelius, reveals some interesting facts about how the Holy Spirit worked in the conversion of Gentiles. First, Cornelius saw a vision telling him to send to Joppa for Peter, who “will tell you what you must do” (Acts 10:3-6). In Joppa, Peter saw a vision of a sheet bound at the four corners descending to earth with “all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air,” and the Lord told him to “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (verses 12, 13). Peter declined, but Jesus said “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (verse 15). He understood the message necessarily implied: “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (verse 28). When Peter arrived at Cornelius’ household and began explaining his mission, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (verse 44). All these events contributed to their conversion, but none of these things saved them! When Peter was criticized for going to the house of a Gentile (Acts 11:1-3), he recounted the events that had transpired and said that Cornelius was told “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (verses 13, 14). Cornelius was told that Peter would tell him what to do; Peter said that Cornelius was saved by words. What did Peter tell him to do to be saved? After seeing that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them, he said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...” (verses 47, 48). That was the same message the Spirit revealed for Jews on Pentecost. When the Jews asked what to do, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit did not have one plan for Jews and another for Gentiles. All were saved by obedience to the Spirit’s message when they were baptized in water for the remission of sins. Peter later wrote, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but by incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides

forever” (1 Peter 1:22). The Holy Spirit always converted through the word, and He still does. God’s plan has not changed.

The Spirit and the Believer

In the first century, the apostles, and those upon whom they laid hands (Acts 8:18), had miraculous ability to reveal and confirm the truth. Paul listed nine miraculous gifts that were given “for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). These gifts were “in part,” but “when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:9,10). Just as surely as “all truth” (the perfect) was revealed through the Spirit, miraculous gifts ceased. There are no new revelations or confirmations. Near the conclusion of his discussion of miraculous gifts, Paul said, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). The message that was “first spoken by the Lord,” was “confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3, 4). The gospel was revealed and confirmed, as Jesus promised (Mark 16:15-20) and we are led by the Spirit as we conform our lives to that message.

In the parables Jesus told about the kingdom, as recorded in chapter four of Mark, Jesus mentioned “hearing” a dozen times. In the letters to the seven churches of Asia, seven times Jesus said, “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Near the end of the book, 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” (Revelation 22:18, 19). Granted, this speaks directly of the book of Revelation, but men who would please God are not free to take from, or add to, any of His revelation.

God’s divine power has “given us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), or “all truth” (John 16:13). Scripture is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). People who are led by the Spirit do not act independently of that message. That revelation was first given through men who were led by the Spirit, then it was partly spoken and partly written, finally the perfect revelation was written and the only way the Spirit leads today is through that revelation. Paul told the Ephesians to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). He told the Colossians to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). We are filled with the Spirit as we allow His word to permeate our lives by reading and practicing its precepts, examples and the things necessarily implied in those. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

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