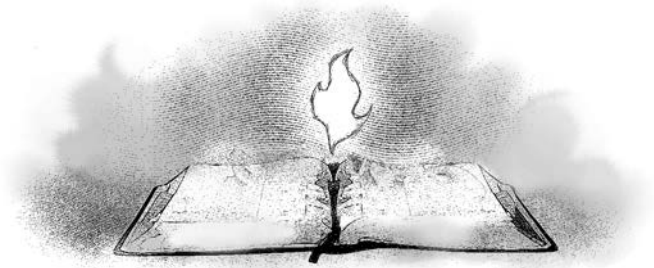


The Spirit *and the* Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 1:19–21, 1 Cor. 2:9–13, Ps. 119:160, John 17:17.*

Memory Text: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and 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, NKJV*).

The Bible says the following about itself: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and 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 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV*). Scripture fulfills this role because it is the Word of God, revealed to humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible the Holy Spirit reveals God’s will to us, showing us how to live a life pleasing to Him.

But the Holy Spirit was operational not only in the distant past, in the origin of the Bible. He is involved with the Word of God in many other important ways even today. And perhaps the most important is our reading the Word and desiring to understand it properly. This is when we need the Holy Spirit. This same divine Spirit awakens in us the desire to embrace the Word of God and to apply its teaching to our lives. Thus, the Spirit works with and through the Written Word to transform us into new creatures in Christ.

This week we will trace the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the Scriptures.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 7.

The Holy Spirit and Revelation

How does God ensure that His will is faithfully transmitted to fallen human beings? He does this in two major related activities of the Holy Spirit: revelation and inspiration.

In the process of revelation, human beings are dependent upon the help of Someone outside of ourselves to reveal things to us that we, as created (and fallen) beings, cannot know of ourselves. That is, the Holy Spirit teaches us truths that have to be told to us (*see, for example, Dan. 2:19–23*); otherwise, we could never know them through natural means.

Revelation is a process in which God makes Himself and His divine will known to humans. The basic idea associated with the word *revelation* is an *unveiling*, or uncovering, a disclosure of something that otherwise is hidden. We need such a revelation because, as finite and fallen beings separated from God because of sin, we are greatly limited in what we can learn on our own. We are dependent upon God to know His will. Hence, we are dependent on God’s revelation because we are not God and have only a very limited natural knowledge of Him.

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. What does this say about the origin of the biblical prophetic message? What does the divine origin of the biblical message tell us about the authority of the Bible?

According to the apostle Peter, the prophetic message of the Old Testament was not of human origin. The prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit in such a way that the content of their message came from God. These men did not create the message themselves. They were merely the vessels of the message, not the originators. Peter was very intentional in stressing the Spirit-inspired source of the prophecies: though written by men, “prophecy never came by the will of man” (*2 Pet. 1:21, NKJV*). And it is this divine origin that gives the Bible its ultimate authority over our lives.

God used human beings to proclaim His Word to the world. How can we be used by the Holy Spirit to do something similar today, not in writing Scripture but in proclaiming what has already been written?

The Holy Spirit and Inspiration

Inspiration is the term used to describe God's influence through the work of the Holy Spirit in transmitting His message through human instruments. The work of the Holy Spirit in the process of inspiration is the reason we find a fundamental unity in all of Scripture in regard to truth. As the Spirit of Truth (*John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13*), the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth.

Read 2 Peter 1:21, Deuteronomy 18:18, Micah 3:8, and 1 Corinthians 2:9–13. What do these texts tell us about the biblical writers and about God's involvement in the origin of the Bible?

Being “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (*2 Pet. 1:21, NIV*) is a strong affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration. In 1 Corinthians 2:9–13, the apostle Paul credits revelation and inspiration to the Holy Spirit. To us, he says, God revealed the hidden things that no eye has seen, which he mentions in verse 9. God revealed them through the Spirit (*1 Cor. 2:10*). The apostles have received this “Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God” (*1 Cor. 2:12, NASB*). Then in verse 13 he moves to the work of inspiration, where he speaks of things “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*” (*NASB*). Paul had no doubt about the source and the authority of what he was proclaiming.

While many parts of the Bible are a result of God's direct supernatural revelation, not everything in the Bible was revealed in that manner. Sometimes God used biblical writers in their careful personal investigation of things or in their use of other existing documents (*Josh. 10:13, Luke 1:1–3*) to reveal and communicate His message. Thus, all parts of the Bible are revealed and inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16*). This is the reason Paul states that “whatever” was written was written for our instruction, so that through “the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NASB*). The God who speaks and who created human language enables chosen people to communicate in human words the inspired thoughts in a trustworthy and reliable manner.

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do His work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 26.

The Holy Spirit and the Truthfulness of Scripture

While revelation is the supernatural act by which God reveals truth to chosen human beings, inspiration is the activity of the Holy Spirit that safeguards the truthfulness of what the human authors wrote, so that their words have the full approval of God. God hates false witness (*Exod. 20:16*) and cannot lie (*Heb. 6:18*). He is called a God of truth (*Ps. 31:5, Isa. 65:16*). In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” (*John 14:17*).

Read Psalm 119:160. What does this teach about anything God reveals to us?

Read John 17:17. What does Jesus say to us here about God’s Word?

The Word of God is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. It is not our task to sit in judgment over Scripture. Scripture, rather, has the right and the authority to judge us. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (*Heb. 4:12, NIV*).

Though, of course, the Bible was written by those living in specific times and places and cultures (how could it have been otherwise?), we should not use that fact to water down or dismiss the message of the Bible to us. Once that door is opened, the Bible becomes subject to humans and to their determination of what is truth. The result is that many people, while claiming to believe the Bible, reject such things as a six-day creation, a worldwide flood, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the literal Second Coming. These are just a few of many biblical truths that fallible people, sitting in judgment on the Scriptures, have thrown out. That’s not a path any of us should ever take.

Why is it so crucial to submit our own judgment to the Word of God rather than vice versa?

The Holy Spirit as Teacher

The Holy Spirit is instrumental, not only in giving us the Written Word of God but also in helping us understand it properly. Human beings are darkened in their understanding of truth; they are, by nature, alienated from God (*Eph. 4:18*). That's why the same Spirit who revealed and inspired the Word of God is the One who enables us to understand it. The problem is not that the Bible is an obscure book. The problem is our sin-tainted attitude toward God, who reveals Himself in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit is a Teacher who desires to lead us into a deeper understanding of Scripture and to a joyful appreciation of the Bible. He brings the truth of God's Word to our attention and gives us fresh insights into those truths so that our lives can be characterized by faithfulness and a loving obedience to God's will. This can happen, though, only if we approach the Bible with a humble and teachable heart.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:13, 14. What does the apostle Paul write about our need to interpret spiritual things spiritually?

In our understanding of the Bible, we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, the spiritual significance of the biblical words is not discerned, only its linguistic meaning. Furthermore, as sinful human beings we often are opposed to God's truth, not because we do not understand it but because we would prefer not to follow it. Without the Holy Spirit there is no affection for God's message. There is no hope, no trust, and no love in response. What the Spirit brings to life is in harmony with the truth already proclaimed in the Bible.

“Many contradictory opinions in regard to what the Bible teaches do not arise from any obscurity in the book itself, but from blindness and prejudice on the part of interpreters. Men ignore the plain statements of the Bible to follow their own perverted reason.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 27, 1885. How has your pride been a stumbling stone that has hindered you from implementing the truth of Scripture in your life? In what areas do your own desires keep you from accepting God's truth in your life? How can you learn to surrender everything to God?

The Holy Spirit and the Word

The Holy Spirit, who has revealed and inspired the content of the Bible to human beings, will never lead us contrary to God's Word in any way.

Read John 5:39, 46, 47 and John 7:38. What authority does Jesus refer to in these texts? How does the Bible confirm that Jesus is the Messiah?

Some people claim to have received special “revelations” and instructions from the Holy Spirit that go against the clear message of the Bible. For them the Holy Spirit has attained a higher authority than God's Word. Whenever the inspired and Written Word of God is nullified and its clear message is evaded, we walk on dangerous ground and do not follow the leading of God's Spirit. The Bible is our only spiritual safeguard. It alone is a reliable norm for all matters of faith and practice.

“Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

Ellen G. White has made it abundantly clear that “the Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

The Holy Spirit is never given to replace the Word of God. He, rather, works in harmony with and through the Bible to draw us to Christ, thus making the Bible the only norm for authentic biblical spirituality. We can be sure that when someone comes making claims that are in contradiction to the Word of God, that person is not speaking the truth. We can't judge hearts or motives. We can, though, judge theology, and the only standard we have to judge it with is the Word of God.

What are some of the teachings that people are trying to promote in the church that are clearly contrary to the Word of God? What should our response be to (1) the people promoting these errors; (2) the errors themselves?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602 in *The Great Controversy*. Read also Ellen G. White, “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” pp. 662–680 in *The Desire of Ages*,

Think about all the truth that we know only because it has been revealed to us in the Bible. Think, for instance, about Creation. What a contrast between what the Word of God teaches about how we were created and how humanity teaches we were created—that is, through the process of what is now called “the neo-Darwinian synthesis.” Look at how wrong humans have it! Think, too, about the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. These are truths that we could never learn on our own. They have to be revealed to us, and they are, in the Word of God, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the most important truth of all, that Jesus Christ died for our sins and that we are saved through faith in Him and His works for us, is a truth that we never could have figured out on our own. We know it only because it has been revealed to us. Think about other truths that we know only because they have been told to us through the Word of God. What should the fact that such crucial truths are found only in the Bible tell us about how central the Word of God needs to be in our lives?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is the Bible a safer guide in spiritual questions than are subjective impressions? What are the consequences when we do not accept the Bible as the standard by which we test all teachings and even our spiritual experiences?
- 2 We often hear the word *truth* used in a variety of contexts. In class, talk about the concept of *truth*, not just what is true or what is not true but about what it means when we say that something is “true.” What does it mean for something to be “true”?
- 3 How should your church react if someone claims to have “new light”?
- 4 Flesh out the radical difference between how the Bible teaches we were created and what human wisdom teaches. What human wisdom teaches, that is, the latest understanding of evolutionary theory, is completely contrary to the Bible message. What should that tell us about why we must trust the Bible above everything else?