

# THE HOLY SPIRIT TODAY

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## PREFACE

Almost 10 years ago, at the end of 2006, I wrote a blog about our dependence on God's power using an experience in India as an example. What I wrote then is true today. This book will help readers learn how to turn the power of God's Spirit back on in their lives and keep it turned on.

**POWER OUTAGE** Periodically, without warning, the electricity in India stops working for an indefinite period of time. It's easy to tell when it happens for the lights go off and fans stop working – it gets dark and uncomfortable quickly. That's what happens when God's power, the Holy Spirit, is grieved or quenched in our lives. We can tell it has happened because we start finding ourselves in darkness. Life gets uncomfortable. That's a sure sign the power has been interrupted. But we don't have to sit in darkness and misery – we can turn back to the source of power, reconnect with God, and again enjoy light and comfort. After all, why sit in the darkness when you can be in the light!  
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**John 3:16-21** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ... Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

*What are some of the early warning signs in your life that God's Spirit is not speaking or working as He should be? What do you usually do (or not do) that grieves Him? What must you do instead so He is always shining in your life?*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

I've been writing blogs about CTO's ministry training pastors for 21 years, Spiritual Warfare Blogs for 14 years and Pastor's blogs for 5 years. That must be about 2,000 blogs! I've written hundreds about God the Father and Jesus the Son, but in checking I found I only wrote 1 about the Trinity and 5 about the Holy Spirit. As a pastor I did several sermons and once an 18-week Wednesday night Bible study on the Holy Spirit. But in 40 years of preaching that isn't much.

That shows a terrible lack of balance in my life and thinking. The worst part is I think that reflects the same imbalance in the evangelical church worldwide today. When is the last time you heard a sermon teaching about the Trinity or the Holy Spirit? We shy away from talking about them because they are hard concepts to understand and put into words. However, they are very important to understand because much of the error and false teaching in the church today comes from a misunderstanding of the Person and role of the Holy Spirit and how He impacts our lives today. I need to rectify that, in my own life and in my writing. I have made studying the Holy Spirit a top priority in my personal life. The following blogs flow out of that study. Christians today seem to either over-emphasize the Holy Spirit or almost ignore Him entirely. I hope they are as helpful for you as they have been for me and bring better balance to the whole subject.

My purpose is not to write an exhaustive doctrinal account of the Holy Spirit but focus on practical daily application based on Biblical truth. Paul's epistles are founded on doctrinal truth followed by practical application. I want to do the same.

The first section of this book, I. The Foundation for Understanding the Holy Spirit, establish the existence of God and the authority of Scriptures, as well as how to accurately interpret them. If you don't feel a need for these topics you can skip to II. The Fact of the Holy Spirit and start there.

# I. THE FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY SPIRIT

In order to have a clear understanding of the Holy Spirit, we must know without a shadow of a doubt He exists. If you already know how to prove the existence of God you can skip this chapter. If you can't prove His existence, or sometimes have doubts about Him, read this carefully.

## A. GOD EXISTS

Everything we believe starts with faith in God. We can't begin to understand the Holy Spirit if we have doubts about the existence of God. How can we know that He really exists, that He created everything and that the God we worship is the only true God? Does He have a plan for our lives? Let's look at these important, foundational truths one by one.

**IS THERE A GOD?** What difference does it make to you if there is a God or not? If there is a God, then He created us and is in authority over us. If there is no God, we are in authority and there is no absolute right or wrong. Yet we know there must be a God. Something inside tells us this, but how can we know that what we believe is true?

**WE CAN'T PROVE GOD BY THE BIBLE.** We can know for sure if there is a God. However, we can't prove God by the Bible until we establish that the Bible is the true, inspired Word of God (chapter 5). The Bible never once tries to prove the existence of God. It always assumes God exists. There are other ways to prove the existence of God.

**WE CAN PROVE GOD BY THE EVIDENCE.** God could prove His existence by speaking out loud, showing Himself to man or in the sky, or any number of supernatural ways. But He doesn't. He will never force anyone to believe in Him. He gives enough proof that we would be foolish not to, but He leaves it up to each person's free will to come to their own conclusions. What acceptable evidence is there for the existence of God?

### 1. ALTERNATIVES ARE INADEQUATE

One proof for believing in the existence of God is that the alternatives to believing in God are not adequate to account for life around us. Some say mankind made up the myth of God to use as a crutch for those who are weak. A few would actually say the idea of a God is harmful because, as they say, it takes away human responsibility. The truth is that it is easier to prove God exists than that He doesn't exist!

**Atheism** says God doesn't exist, but that is impossible to prove. Let me explain it this way. Which is harder to prove, that black cats do exist or that they don't exist? To prove they do exist all you have to do is find one black cat anywhere any time. However, to prove they don't exist means you must search every space in the universe where a black cat could possibly be to prove that there are none there. The Russian Cosmonauts went into space and came back saying, "There is no God. We didn't see Him." But they didn't go into every corner of the universe and look in every dimension, so they can't make that statement. To make the statement that there is no God, one must have all knowledge (be omniscient). It's impossible to say there is no God. One can say that he doesn't believe there is a God. That is a true and accurate statement. But, believing something doesn't determine the truth. One can believe they don't have to pay taxes, but that doesn't change the absolute truth that taxes must be paid. So, atheism can deny God exists but can't prove it.

**Agnosticism** says that if there is a God, He is unknowable; we cannot know God or anything about Him. But that statement actually proves we can know something about Him: that He is unknowable. How can anyone possibly prove we can't know God? That is an opinion.

**Theism** states that God exists and we can know Him. It is the only rational, defensible position to take. God is 'provable.' We must admit we cannot prove God by the scientific method, however, neither can anyone prove scientifically that Napoleon existed. There is nothing of either of them to handle, to put under a microscope. No one now alive has seen either of them. Yet, there is plenty of evidence to prove the existence of each one. There is logical, rational proof that there is a God. These are **fingerprints** of God, marks of His existence that He leaves for us to find. Fingerprints are proof that someone has been at a certain place. In a court of law, they are proof enough of the guilt of a person. Even if no one saw the person, his fingerprints prove he had been there. God has left fingerprints behind to show us His existence. These are some of the main ones:

## **2. ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

**1. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT** is based on cause and effect. There must be an uncaused **cause** for every effect. No **effect** can be produced without a cause that is outside it and greater than it. That book on your table proves there was someone who made it, for it wouldn't have been able to make itself. The same is true of the world around us. This is also true of our emotions. Animals don't have emotions like we have. Where did they come from if not from God? Everything must have a source. There must have been someone beyond and greater than us to create them. The universe needed a first cause to begin its existence. It also needs a first cause to continue its existence today.

**Motion** in the universe also proves there must be a God. Nothing can move itself; an external agent or force is required. There must be a Being who is the ultimate source of all motion in the universe, or it couldn't have gone from non-motion to motion by itself. If you close your eyes and open them to see a ball rolling across the floor you will rightly assume something or someone started the movement of the ball. It didn't start on its own for it is unable to start itself.

Everything in nature is **interrelated** and absolutely dependent on the other. There must be a Being who is totally independent of and above this to start it all.

Everything is moving away from **perfection**, breaking down. The second law of thermodynamics states this. This winding down (entropy) points back to a starting time and shows things moving away from perfection. This, too, points back to God.

**2. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT** is based on order and design. No one would ever think a wristwatch could come into being on its own. We assume there was an intelligent designer behind it. For this world to just 'happen' would be like the dictionary resulting from an explosion in a print shop! The fact that there is **order** in the universe points back to Someone causing that order (Hebrews 11:3). **Design**, too, shows there is a God. Whatever is made requires a designer (Romans 1:20). Creation is stamped with beauty and design to show us God (Psalm 19:1).

For example, the earth is in just the right spot to receive the correct amount of heat from the sun. If the earth were a little closer to the sun it would burn, if further from the sun everything would freeze. Similarly, if the rotation of the earth around the sun was any faster or slower, if the revolution on its axis was faster or slower, or if the tilt of the earth was any greater or less, we would freeze or melt. We could analyze the human eye, the brain, or any of thousands of other organisms and in each of them find intricate detail beyond what we can imagine or what chance could have ever produced.

The world around us clearly shows the fingerprints of God. Romans 1:20 says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are

made, even his eternal power and godhead." "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork." Psalm 19:1

**3. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARGUMENT** uses the existence of our **moral nature** to point to God. Where did our moral nature come from? Surely our possession of it argues for the existence of a moral governor to whom man feels accountable and responsible. All people everywhere at all times have had moral standards. All people always have known there is a right and wrong (Romans 2:14-15). Were the Nazis guilty of any wrongdoing even though they didn't break the laws of their own country? Everyone instinctively knows they are because we are all aware of a higher law that is written in the conscience of each and every one of us.

In addition, the moral values we hold inside are not always rewarded in this life. Something inside man cries that there must be reward for good and punishment for evil. All men long for justice. Where did this desire come from? Even more, when will it be fulfilled? This, and the basic belief in life beyond this life that all people have always held point to a power and force beyond man that will reward good and punish evil beyond this life. We all know inside there must be something more to life than just these years on this earth. Where did this restlessness and awareness come from if there was nothing there to meet it?

**4. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT** simply states that man everywhere in all time has naturally known there is a power greater than and outside himself that he has worshipped. Satan has counterfeited this and taken the worship for himself, but it is natural for all people to worship something, and that is from God.

**5. THE SUBJECTIVE INNER AWARENESS ARGUMENT** points out that those who are God's children know inside there is a God. It can't be put under a microscope, or even described, but there is a confident inner awareness that there is a God (Galatians 4:6) deep within us that gives an assurance beyond the need of external proof that there is a God who loves and cares. Where does this come from if not from God Himself?

**6. SUPERNATURAL PROOF** also shows there must be a divine power over all that happens. Think of the hundreds and hundreds of accounts of those who weren't Christians having **dreams** of someone they identified as Jesus showing them love and acceptance, encouraging them to seek to know more about Him. There are scores of verified accounts of people having **visions and pre-death experiences** of the afterlife, some glorious and others fear-producing, but all warnings to be ready for what is to come. Also, there are over 900 scholarly articles and documents validating **near death experiences (NDE)** of people who have been pronounced dead but later came back to life and tell vivid accounts about what they experienced either going to a wonderful paradise or a place of darkness and misery. God uses these experiences to give the needed warning or encouragement to people so they can seek His truth when given another chance at life. I personally know of accounts of activities than can only be described as **angel involvement**. We cannot doubt there is a dark, evil element in the world which can only be explained by **Satan and demons**. Paranormal experiences and psychic experiences abound. In my spiritual warfare ministry, I can attest to many such experiences and testimonies. Then there are the untold number of **miraculous healings** and other miracles today, often attested to by medical records. There are even accounts of people who have died and been issued a death certificate coming back to life. Much of this takes part in third world countries where the gospel is just starting to attack the forces of evil that rule, showing God is more powerful and can bring victory. These are not conclusive proof of God, but certainly contribute to the knowledge that there is another dimension and our existence is not limited to the material world we can see and touch.

If there is this strong, conclusive proof of God, then **WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE REJECT THE IDEA OF GOD?** The reason is that if man admits there is a power greater than himself, then it only stands to reason that he is accountable to that power. If there is a God, man is responsible to find what

God would have of him and then obey it. However, man wants to be his own god and not submit to anyone. Thus, it isn't because of a lack of evidence that man rejects the idea of God, but because of self-centered presuppositions. In order to live life for himself and continue in his own prideful and selfish existence, man must deny God. To admit to a God means man then must obey His will and direction or face the consequences. Man doesn't want to do either. He thinks that by denying there is a God he exempts himself from accountability to that God. However, saying God doesn't exist doesn't make it so. Even convincing ourselves completely He doesn't exist does nothing to remove Him from existence. In doing so, man is gambling with his own eternal destiny, putting it on the line for a few short years of self-centered indulgence.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS FROM THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

If God exists, there are **absolutes** in the world, and we are responsible to follow them. He has a daily plan for us and a set of rights and wrongs to which we must adhere. It is not up to us to decide what we want to see as right or wrong. He has already decided, and we are accountable according to His measuring scale, not ours.

If God exists, then so does the **Holy Spirit** for He is God Himself. We'll see proof for that later but if there were no God there could be no Spirit.

If there is a God there is a **plan and purpose** for everything. We cannot meet our own needs, solve our own problems or make our own decisions as if there is no God. Worry, fear, and control are not allowed or necessary. We are to live a life of faith and trust.

Finally, there is an **eternal plan** as well. This life is not all there is. Eternity (heaven or hell) is the destiny of everyone. Eternal separation from God or eternal bliss in God's very presence are the future prospects of every human being.

Do you believe God exists? Do you believe for yourself, not because others around you believe it? Do you believe it with your whole being, not just as an intellectual fact in your head? There are tremendous implications if you believe this or if you don't. If you believe, then you recognize your accountability to God and responsibility to learn about Him and follow Him.

## **B. THE BIBLE IS TRUE**

Having established that it is more reasonable to believe that God exists than that He doesn't, we must look at our sources of knowledge about Him. If God didn't reveal Himself to man we wouldn't know anything about Him. He reveals Himself in creation and nature (Romans 1-2, Psalm 19). He also reveals Himself in the written Word to give us more detail and a fuller understanding of Him. That's where we learn about the Holy Spirit.

How do we know the Bible is the one true book from God to man? There is a lot of proof. (Many thanks to "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell for his excellent book and insights into this subject. It is a book I highly recommend.)

Starting with the acceptance that there is a God (chapter 1), it is then reasonable that God would reveal Himself to man. God has revealed important characteristics about Himself in creation such as His sovereignty, love, and justice. But that doesn't give us enough information to really know Him. For man to really know God **it is necessary for God to reveal Himself to man**, for man could never find God without God making the first move. If God has truth to reveal, if man is accountable, and if God wants a relationship with man then that must start from God's side. Not only is this necessary, **it is also possible for God to reveal Himself to man**. Were He really God it would be totally within His possibility

to communicate truth to us and keep it accurate down to our day. That would not be too hard for Him at all. Thus, we know that a revelation from God to man is both necessary and possible. But is the Bible that revelation? The evidence shows it is.

## **1. THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE SHOWS IT IS FROM GOD**

The Bible is unique in that it was written by 44 men over 1,500 years. These men did not know each other. Most (but not all) were Jews, but they came from very different backgrounds and cultures. Some were educated, others not. Some were kings, others shepherds. One was a doctor, another a tax collector and still another a shepherd. These men lived on three different continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. Moses wrote in the desert of Sinai, Paul wrote in a prison in Rome, Daniel wrote in exile in Babylon and Ezra wrote in the ruined city of Jerusalem.

In addition, the Bible was written under many different circumstances. Some wrote during war (David, Joshua), others during times of sorrow (Jeremiah, Nehemiah) and still others in prison (Paul, John). They wrote for different reasons. The prophets warned of coming judgment for sin, the Gospel writers were showing Jesus as God come to earth, Paul and Peter wrote to encourage new believers and Moses wrote to record history.

Their writings covered hundreds of topics, yet no writer contradicts another. The whole book remains united in all it says. Imagine 44 men from vastly different backgrounds and places writing over a period of 1,500 years and all agreeing on everything they write about theology, history, science, ethics and every area of life. What are the chances of all agreeing on everything? The only explanation is that there must have been One Author behind it all – God Himself.

## **2. THE CONTENT OF THE BIBLE SHOWS IT IS FROM GOD**

It has been correctly stated that the Bible isn't a book man would write if he could or could write if he would. Let me explain.

If men were writing a book they wanted others to believe they would not say that everything was **created** by nothing (Hebrews 11:3). 'Nothing' is a state mankind has never known. All other religions developed an explanation for the origin of the universe that made sense to their followers at the time. No one would say everything came from nothing unless it was true and unless God Himself was inspiring what was being written.

If the men who wrote the Bible were just making up a new religion on their own they wouldn't make **God sovereign and in absolute control** (1 Chronicles 29:11; Isaiah 43:7) while all mankind can do is submit to His will and serve Him (Revelation 4:11). All other 'holy' books focus on man and build up man, not God.

Another thing man inventing a religion would not say is that there is **only one God**. Monotheism is unheard of except in the Bible and the religions that come from it: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All other religions are polytheistic, they believe in more than one god. Scholars tell us that man started by imagining many gods and gradually let the more powerful ones conquer the less powerful. The Bible says there is one God from the very beginning. The Jews themselves struggled to accept this, as seen by the golden calf and other idols they often worshipped. God had to command them to worship Him alone (Exodus 20:1-6). They believed in many gods and had to be taught there was just one true God.

The Bible speaks clearly and in detail about other subjects man wouldn't make up on his own. The **Trinity** is something impossible to understand and not a teaching that many men over hundreds of years would all come up with on their own. Why would they write something that others wouldn't understand and would reject if they wanted their religion and book to be accepted?

The same is true of **sin**. Why would they say everyone is sinful and there is nothing anyone can do to please God (Romans 3:23; 6:23)? Only the Bible says there is no way for man on his own to

reach God, it is only by His grace and mercy that He reaches us (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible says God has absolutes to which we are all accountable but which we cannot meet on our own.

Then there are subjects the Bible writers spoke authoritatively about over the centuries. These include **angels, Satan, demons, heaven and hell** (1 Corinthians 2:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 19:20-21). How could so many men say the same thing without knowing each other? They couldn't or wouldn't all make up the same things if they weren't true. And if they were true, how would these various writers know these things? God revealing them and directing their writing is the only answer.

Clearly the Bible is not a book man would write if He could or could write if he would. Yet there is even more proof the Bible contains information no man could have ever known.

### **3. THE PROPHECIES OF THE BIBLE SHOW IT IS FROM GOD**

The Bible is filled with hundreds of specific prophecies which have come true in the past. There is no way man could have guessed at these things with any kind of accuracy. For example:

Ezekiel 26, which was written in 587 B.C., predicted the destruction of Tyre, a city made up of two parts: a mainland port city, and an island city half a mile off shore. Ezekiel prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city, many nations would fight against her, the debris of the city would be thrown into the ocean, the city would never be found again, and fishermen would come there to lay their nets. In 573 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city of Tyre. Many of the refugees of the city sailed to the island, and the island city of Tyre remained a powerful city. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great laid siege to the island city of Tyre. Using the rubble of mainland Tyre, he built a causeway to the island city. He then captured and completely destroyed the city. Today, Tyre is a small fishing town where fishing boats come to rest and fisherman spread their nets. The great ancient city of Tyre to this day lies buried in ruins exactly as prophesied. If we were to calculate the odds of this event happening by chance, the figures would be astronomical. No, it was not by coincidence. ("Evidence that Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell)

There are nearly one hundred prophecies made about Jesus in the Old Testament, prophecies such as His place of birth, His life, His rejection by the nation of Israel, how he would die and so on. All these prophecies were made hundreds of years before Jesus ever came to earth. Because of the accuracy of the prophecies, many skeptics have believed that they must have been written after A.D. 70—after the birth and death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem, thereby trying to deny that they are even prophecies. However, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These scrolls contained the book of Isaiah and other prophetic books. When dated, they were found to be written from 120 to 100 B.C., well before Jesus was born. Some say these prophecies were fulfilled by chance, but the odds against this would be exceptionally large. It would take a greater leap of faith to believe in them happening by chance than in the fact that Jesus is God and these prophecies are divinely inspired.

Experts in probability mathematics have come up with these statistics concerning the following prophecies:

- 7 prophecies against Tyre in Ezekiel 26:3-4,7-8,12,14,21 coming true: 1 in  $7.5 \times 10^7$
- 5 prophecies against Samaria in Hosea 13:16 & Micah 1:6 come true: 1 in  $4 \times 10^4$
- 5 prophecies against Gaza & Ashkelon in Amos 1:8, Jeremiah 47:5, Zephaniah 2:4-7: 1 in  $1.2 \times 10^4$
- 3 prophecies against Moab & Ammon in Ezekiel 25:3-4, Jeremiah 48:47; 49:6: 1 in  $10^3$
- 9 prophecies against Edom in Isa 34:6-15, Jeremiah 49:17-18; Ezekiel 25:13-14; 35:5-7:1 in  $10^4$
- 8 prophecies against Babylon in Isa 13:19-22; 14:23; Jeremiah 51:26,43: 1 in  $5 \times 10^9$
- 9 prophecies about Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: 1 in  $8 \times 10^{10}$
- 7 prophecies about Palestine in Lev 26:31-33; Ezekiel 36:33-35: 1 in  $2 \times 10^5$

9 prophecies about Petra & Edom in Isa 34:6-18; Ezekiel 25:13-14; 35:5-7:1 in  $2 \times 10^5$

4 prophecies about Thebes & Memphis in Ezekiel 30:13-15: 1 in  $10^3$

4 prophecies about Nineveh in Nahum 1:8,10; 2:6; 3:10,13,19: 1 in  $10^2$

The probability of these 11 prophecies coming true is 1 in  $5.76 \times 10^{59}$ ! This is almost impossible to visualize. Suppose this number were silver dollars. There would be enough to fill  $10^{28}$  suns! Or think of it like this. In the universe there are about 2 trillion galaxies, each containing about 100 million stars. From our  $5 \times 10^{59}$  we could make all of the stars in all of the galaxies  $2 \times 10^5$  times! Only one silver dollar in all of these stands for the chance a writer could have guessed all these prophecies correctly! Even more astounding is the fact that these are only 11 separate prophecies. There are literally hundreds and hundreds of others which have already come true. (For more information about this see "Evidence That Demands A Verdict" by Josh McDowell).

#### **4. THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE SHOWS IT IS FROM GOD**

Archaeology is the study of past people and civilizations based on evidences for their existence found in the ground where they lived. William F. Albright, one of the greatest archaeologists ever, said, "The Bible's incredible historical memory has been many times validated by the process of discovery. No archaeological discovery has contradicted a Biblical reference." Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, states that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. Dr. William Albright, who was probably the foremost authority in Middle East archaeology in his time, said this about the Bible: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament. At this time, the number of archaeological discoveries that relate to the Bible number in the hundreds of thousands." (for more information see "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell)

Time and time again archaeology has found the Bible to be completely true and totally accurate. People, events, locations and customs have been verified over and over. One example is the Hittite nation. The Bible says they were a powerful force from about 1750 BC to 1200 BC (Genesis 15:20, 2 Samuel 11, and 1 Kings 10:29). However, nothing was known of them from any other source than the Bible, so Bible critics said they were an invention of the imagination of the Bible authors. Then about a hundred years ago archaeologists digging in Turkey discovered the capital city of the Hittite empire. They found a huge library with thousands of tablets and discovered the greatness and power of this empire. The Bible had been right all along.

Another example is the city of Jericho. The Bible tells about how the walls fell down for Joshua and the Jews to conquer the city, but many said that was a myth. Archaeological discoveries at the site of Jericho now fit in perfectly with the Bible record.

There is no other ancient book that is so well supported by archaeological evidence as the Bible. More are being uncovered all the time. This alone might not prove that the Bible is inspired, but it does show the accuracy of the Bible when it was written and how it has carried down to us today. If miracles, such as Jericho's fall, are validated by archaeology, that is further proof that they happened. We know that only God can do miracles.

The greatest miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, is proclaimed by the Bible. Proving that miracle is further proof of the inerrancy of the Bible. We will look at that proof in chapter 10.

## **5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLE SHOWS IT IS FROM GOD**

Often the accuracy of the Bible as we have it today is questioned. Doubtters say it has been changed since it was written and there is no way we can prove what we have today is what was written many years ago. They are wrong, there is proof.

One of the strongest proofs is the number and exactness of the ancient copies of the Bible which we have today. There are 1,700 manuscripts of the Old Testament, and the oldest is about 100 years after it was first written. They all say the same thing. There is only one minor difference for every 2,000 words, and none of them affects any point of truth or theology. The recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls contained Old Testament manuscripts 1,000 years older than any that had been found before, yet there was no difference between them and what we had before they were discovered!

For the New Testament there are 13,000 manuscripts. The oldest portion was copied about 10 years after the original was written. In them there is only one minor difference in every 200,000 words, and again none that affect any teaching or doctrine. Portions of Scripture have also come down in many different languages as quoted in the works of hundreds of authors. They, too, confirm the accuracy of Bible.

This does not prove that God inspired the Bible, but it does show that what we have is an exact copy of what was originally written. It also shows the special care God is taking to make sure His Word comes down to us the same as it was written. For other ancient books scholars are glad to have several copies, even hundreds and hundreds of years after the original. The great amount of trustworthy proof of the Bible shows it is indeed special and protected by God.

## **6. THE SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE SHOWS IT IS FROM GOD**

We are all well aware of how quickly scientific truth changes as new discoveries are made. Often scientific books are outdated before they are even finished being printed. That is not true of the Bible, though. The Bible spoke accurately of scientific truths thousands of years before man 'discovered' them, while the very writers often believed the opposite of what they were writing. For example, the Bible says the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11) yet until recent times doctors bled people to cure them. The Bible says the physical world is basically non-physical in its ultimate essence (Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16-17), something no human writer could or would have guessed at. The Bible has always said the earth was round (Isaiah 40:22), rotates (Job 38:12,14), has gravity (Job 26:7), and the whole solar system orbits in the universe (Psalm 19:16). These are all facts science has just 'discovered' recently. Man believed the moon was greater than the earth for many centuries, but the Bible says opposite (Genesis 1:16). Even atomic energy and its result is found in 2 Peter 3:10-12 (the Greek word means to "loose" or "set free" as what happens when atoms are released). The laws of thermodynamics are in the Bible, too: #1 (Genesis 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:3,10) and #2 (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12; Romans 8:20-22). There are hundreds of other examples as well.

## **7. OTHER PROOFS SHOW THE BIBLE IS FROM GOD**

Other lines of evidence could be shown to support the Bible as well. For example, the preservation and regathering of the **nation Israel** after 2,000 years is proof of the greatness of the Bible. It has never before happened, nor was it ever thought possible to happen, for a group of people to survive 2,000 years without a homeland yet stay a separate cultural unity. That has happened with the Jews. Where are the Ammonites? Philistines? Hittites? The Jews still exist and are now back in their homeland, truly a sociological miracle!

Then there is the **literary value** of the Bible. It has been the best-selling book of all time and withstands centuries of attacks by those trying to destroy it. How could such unlearned men write such a surpassing piece of literary genius beyond their own ability? The Bible far exceeds the intellectual and moral qualifications of other books being written in its time such as the Talmud (Jewish), Apocrypha (Christian) and Koran (Islamic). The living quality of the words of the Bible, reaching to all ages and social positions of people for century after century, show its uniqueness. The Bible is deep enough for the most gifted scholar to spend a lifetime in one small portion of it and never get out all there is, but also simple enough for a young child to read and understand. One of the greatest truths expressed is just 7 monosyllables, each 3 letters or less: "You in me and I in you" (John 14:20). The Bible stories are never hurried or cramped, neither are they drawn out and boring. The Bible does not gloss over the sins of its heroes, neither does it overemphasize them. The values and opinions of the individual writers are not the focus, just the story they are telling. The Bible continues to be alive and fresh generation after generation.

One more proof, a very subjective one, is that the **Holy Spirit affirms to our spirit** that the Bible is the Word of God. As Christians, we just 'know' it is God's book. We have assurance deep down inside us that we can trust and follow the Bible.

These are all very good reasons to believe the Bible is God's Word. As I said at the beginning, it is very necessary and very possible God would reveal His truth to mankind through a book. Write down the reasons given which seem strongest to you so you can remember them and use them when talking to someone about why you believe the Bible is God's Word. It's very important to understand and believe this, for if the Bible isn't God's Word, then nothing else in the rest of the book will be true either! But if it is, then everything it says is accurate and trustworthy.

If there is this great body of evidence, **why do so many deny the Bible as being God's Word?** Let me answer that with a story. Many years ago, while on a visit to England, a wealthy man was fascinated by a powerful microscope. He looked through its lens to study crystals and the petals of flowers. He was amazed at their beauty and detail. He bought one and took it home. He thoroughly enjoyed using it until one day he examined some food he was planning to eat for dinner. It was his favorite food and he loved it. He discovered tiny living creatures were crawling in it. He didn't know what to do. Finally he concluded there was only one way out of this dilemma: he smashed the microscope to pieces. He didn't want anything to interfere with his pleasure. That is what man tries to do to the Bible when it shows up his sin. Like bugs under a rock run from the light when the rock is turned over, so man in sin runs from the light of God's truth about him.

Do you believe The Bible is God's inspired Word for us today? Do you believe for yourself, not because others around you believe it? Do you believe it with your whole being, not just as an intellectual fact in your head? There are tremendous implications if you believe this as well as if you don't. If you believe then you recognize your accountability to know and follow the Bible in all you do. That is a great privilege but also an awesome responsibility.

## **TRUTH IS ONLY FOUND IN GOD'S WORD, NOT FEELINGS OR EMOTIONS**

From childhood on we are bombarded with the message "just follow your heart," "if it feels right it can't be wrong," "choose love," etc. Disney entertainment packages this well and makes it seem right and true. Christians often believe that God wants them happy more than anything else so He will give us our heart's dreams and desires. But that conflicts with what the Bible says: "*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?*" *Jeremiah 17:9* The heart refers to the center of our being,. The source of our feelings and emotions. Feelings can be deceptive. Our only authority is God's Word and when what is written conflicts with what we think or

feel, we need to change. Unfortunately, many Christians today, out of ignorance or preference, reject what the Bible says and go by their own ideas and emotions.

Only God's Word can be trusted. *Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.* When we know the Bible we know God's mind and heart, and only then can we truly follow Him and His ways. *Acts 13:22 I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.* Errors about the Holy Spirit often come from putting subjective feelings above the objective truth of God's Word. God's Word is sufficient so go by it, not your feelings and emotions.

## **LET YOUR MIND EXPLAIN REALITY TO YOUR EMOTIONS (Mind and Emotions 1)**

People who have been under my ministry have heard me say "Let your mind explain reality to your emotions" many times. Emotions are powerful and important. Life would be dull without them. Jesus showed emotion on many occasions. Emotions are great, but they are the dessert in life, not the main course. When they drive the train it's easy to get off the track. As in many things in life, balance is what is needed.

The problem comes when emotions are used for a purpose other than which they were created. When they are used to get a desired reaction, that is manipulation. Advertisers, communicators and even churches do this all the time. People are quicker to respond to something that has stirred their emotions than they are to objective truth. It's not a bad thing to have emotions in church. The right emotion at the right time expressed in the right way is a powerful way to connect with God and others. Emotions are good things and should be part of church life and worship – but they aren't the main thing. They are a means to an end, not the end itself. It's OK to "Feel good," but if that is the ultimate focus of a service or event then something is missing. There are certain dangers from focusing on emotion in church and getting people to feel something instead of inviting people to believe something and then respond to that belief.

God gave us emotions to respond to truth in a meaningful way. Jesus said we are to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). It takes both. An emotional response to something that is true in appropriate. But when we focus on the feeling instead of the truth behind it, we leave ourselves open to deception and disappointment. When we expect to always "feel" good, or "feel" close to God or "feel" His presence, then we limit Him and put our emotions before the facts.

As a pastor, I know it can be tempting to play to people's emotions to get them to like a service or a sermon. Stories that touch our sentiments, music that stirs our feelings or testimonies that stimulate our emotions are short-cuts to getting a response. Some people look for that in a church, but when someone depends on an emotional 'fix' each Sunday they aren't growing in faith.

I've been in churches when the pastor gave an invitation to receive Jesus after the service but no one came forward publicly. To their way of thinking, this meant the sermon was a failure. To save face and remove embarrassment, the pastor would say or do things to try to manipulate a response, usually out of guilt. That's not the way to measure the success of a message or service.

It's not that long ago that churches had a revival in the spring and fall. A guest speaker would come and special music was provided. If 'successful,' people would get moved to greater faithfulness in their Christian life. However, these commitments often didn't last but gradually faded as the emotional high from the services faded. Then in another 6 months another revival to produce another jolt of emotion was needed to jump-start them again. That's not how the Christian life is meant to be lived.

Feeling "good" after church is fine, but if it is our feelings we fixate on when leaving instead of a total response to the truth of God's Word, it won't last. Still, that's often what people look for in a

church and the yardstick by how they measure their Sunday morning experience. Yet church isn't about you or me, is it? It's about God and faithfully serving Him. I personally know the pressure a pastor feels to have the people like the Sunday morning experience so they come back. The amount of money given in the offering is directly related to people liking the experience enough to come back and contribute financially. Those often become the measuring stick we use to determine the success or failure of a church or pastor. My heart goes out to pastors who faithfully preach God's Word to people who are cold and immersed in sin they don't want to give up. I hope you're not one of those kind of people!

***Romans 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

*Do you let your mind explain reality to your emotions, or do your feelings overly influence your moods and decisions?*

*Read the verses above. What is your mental response to this passage? What emotions come from this truth in God's Word?*

## **BALANCING FAITH AND FEELINGS (Mind and Emotions 2)**

(In the last blog we talked about the place of emotions in our life. We saw they are important responses, but not what we base our faith or decisions on. We'll conclude this topic here.)

Emotion is great, but it must be in response to and based on the greatness of God and His grace to us. When something is done to get an emotional response, and it works, then that same thing must be done again and again, every week. People become addicted to feeling good and go where they'll experience it every time they attend. But they won't grow in faith, their roots won't go deeper in Jesus and they won't mature spiritually. They aren't becoming more like Jesus, which is God's goal for us in life (Romans 8:29). Jesus experienced much joy, but He didn't depend on it nor did He expect it all the time in life.

When a church service focuses more on moving stories than God's Word, when the spotlight is on the speaker and he is lifted up more than Jesus, when more time is spent on activities to entertain and bring enjoyment than challenges to turn from sin and grow in faith, then something is wrong. Yet these kinds of services often attract large crowds and enjoy great popularity. That really says something about the shallowness of Christianity in these places.

No one who knows me would call me an overly emotional person, but I do love feeling God's presence in my life. It happens most in private worship or in preaching/teaching His Word. It comes in response to the Spirit revealing to me God's greatness and awesome power and love. I cherish those times. But that's just a small portion of my life. Most of the time I don't feel those things, even though I still know the truth about God in my heart. Spiritual maturity isn't based on being high on Jesus all the time, it's keeping the faith when going through the daily routine of life and facing painful trials and difficulties. My feelings then are more of sadness, anxiety, stress and uncertainty. But I focus on the truth of God's promises and love, even if I don't experience them at the moment. That's what builds spiritual maturity. During those times we must let our minds explain reality to our emotions. Our minds know that God will never leave us or desert us (1 Corinthians 3:16; 10:13; John 14:15-17, 24-26). Focus on that, no matter the circumstances you face.

How can we have the right balance of mind and emotions? How do we learn to mix our faith and feelings in right proportion? First of all, learn to **focus on God instead of yourself**. What you

can do for Him is more important than what He can do for you. Unfortunately, in life we often want everything to revolve around us, even in church. Keep your focus on Jesus and all He has done for you. Don't keep looking at yourself, your situation, your needs and hurts or your challenges and difficulties. You need to deal with them, but always see them in contrast to all you have in Jesus.

Then, **fill your mind and heart with Scripture**. Study the Bible daily. Think about it. Memorize passages that speak to you. Listen to Christian music or teachers so you can keep your focus on Him. When you come across a Bible passage that stands out, write it down and read it over and over. Commit it to memory.

Also, **trust God's promises**, even (especially) when you don't sense His presence or feel His nearness. He promises to always be with you and never leave you (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5) – believe Him. His nearness isn't measured by your feelings but by His faithfulness. When you are confused or discouraged, talk to Him about it. At hard times, draw closer to Him, don't turn from Him.

***Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

*How is your balance between your mind and your emotions? Which direction do you lean to?*

*What have you learned about the place of emotions from these 2 blogs?*

*Read the verses above again. What is your mental response to this passage? What emotions come from this truth in God's Word?*

## **C. INTERPRETING THE BIBLE CORRECTLY**

God's Word is our final absolute authority and source of truth. But many misinterpret and twist what it says so it seems to line up with they want it to say. Before looking further at the Holy Spirit, we must be sure we set the right principles of Biblical interpretation. Much of the error about the Bible today claims to be based on what the Bible says, so it's a matter of correct interpretation.

### **1. KEEP EVERYTHING IN CONTEXT**

One of the first and most important lessons to learn when studying the Bible is to keep everything in context. That is the anchor that helps you understand what is being said. Without considering the context, any word or verse can mean almost anything at all. Keeping the context in mind limits the possible meaning, pins it down, connects it to a time and place that can be understood.

When airplanes were starting to be used, Charles Lindberg, a famous pilot, was flying when a valuable instrument fell overboard and down into a field of bushes below. He landed his plane nearby and went looking for it but couldn't find it anywhere. He took off his coat, spread it out on a bush, then flew up over the field again. He was able to spot his instrument and notice where it was in relationship to his coat. After this, he could then land and easily find the valuable piece of equipment. That's how it is in Bible study. The context gives you a reference point to build from, a starting place which guides and directs all that comes next.

For example, think of going to see a play in a theater. Suppose there were no props, nothing to show if the events were happening inside, outside, or in India or Europe. If the people just stood there and talked it would be much harder to understand what was happening. Or suppose you went to see

a movie, but were blindfolded through the whole thing and all you could do was hear the people talk. How much of what was happening would you miss because you didn't see the context, the setting for what is happening.

## **a. PASSAGE CONTEXT**

No verse or passage in the Bible stands alone. It must be taken in context. Suppose you walk into a room where some friends are talking and you walk up to them. The first thing you do is listen to find out what they are talking about. If you just listen to a sentence or two and then start talking, you could miss the whole point of what they are saying.

In order to understand a Bible passage, you must understand what comes before and after the passage. You don't have to know all the details, but generally what is happening. What is the writer talking about before the passage? For example, Isaiah 53:5 says "by His stripes we are healed." Many take that to refer to physical healing, but the verses before show it is about emotional and spiritual pain.

It's also important to know what the whole chapter and book are about. Paul says "I die daily" in 1 Corinthians 15:31. Just looking at that one verse, we can think he means daily dying spiritually to himself and what he wants. But the context of the chapter shows he is referring to the possibility of physically dying (see verses 4-8, 12-17, 20-23, 35-42, 56-57).

Another example is Revelation 3:20 where we read that Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Taken by itself it could refer to Him coming to people offering them salvation, but the context shows this is written to a church of believers who have turned their back on Him. He wants the church to renew its commitment to live for Him.

In John 6:1-5 Jesus asked Philip where they could get enough bread to feed all the people. Some say Jesus asked Philip because he was calm under pressure, or because he had lived nearby and knew the area, but if you read verse 6 you will find the answer.

Another example is John 16:7 where Jesus says that when He goes back to heaven He will send the 'Helper.' We can speculate and guess about what He is referring to, or we can go to John 14:26 where He says the 'Helper' is the Holy Spirit!

Suppose you are walking down the street and find a piece of paper lying on the ground. You pick it up and realize it is part of a letter, but you don't have the first or last page. You don't know who wrote it, who it is to, if it is very old or recent, or even if it was written from or to a different country. All these things would be very important to gain an accurate understanding of what was written. To think you can accurately understand the letter with only a part of the middle of it is foolish. So it is with studying the Bible.

## **b. GEOGRAPHY CONTEXT**

The geographical context of a passage refers to where it happened, the location of what is going on. It can shed much light onto what is happening. If you find an old book and inside it are a few pages from a diary, it would be very important to know in which country the words had been written. They would be much harder to understand apart from its geographical context.

A good example is Matthew 19:1-9 where the religious rulers challenge Jesus about divorce. Some interpret those words as if Jesus is talking to Christians today, but that is far from the truth. You see, Jesus had already addressed the topic of divorce with these men earlier (Matthew 5:27-32), so why are they asking again? Certainly not to learn what He thinks for they already know that. So why

ask if they already knew the answer? Because Jesus has just entered the territory ruled by Herod Antipas, who recently beheaded John the baptizer for saying he shouldn't have taken another man's wife. These rulers who were jealous of Jesus wanted him to say something that could be used to get Herod to arrest and kill Jesus as well. They thought if He talked against divorce, Herod might hear and arrest Jesus, too. We must keep this in mind when interpreting and understanding Jesus' words on divorce here.

### **c. HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

History refers to those portions of the Bible which give information about people, places, events, groups or time periods. Genesis through Ruth and Matthew through Acts are mainly history. Today we have historical books and novels and biographies.

Questions like who?, what?, when? why?, where? and how? are good to help understand the historical context of a passage.

**WHO** is involved?

**WHEN** in history did it happen?

**WHERE** was it located?

**WHAT** happened?

**WHAT** was life like then?

**HOW** did it happen?

**HOW** did it affect them?

**WHY** did it happen?

**WHY** is it recorded for us?

Using other books like a Bible dictionary or handbook can help with this. Footnotes in your Bible or reading a Bible commentary about the passage can help as well. My book on "Bible Overview" is very good for this as well. Don't become dependent on them, though. Do your own study and just let them supplement it. Chew your own food!

As you pay attention to the context, you will notice some of the questions you wrote earlier will be answered, but you may come up with new questions as well. Write them down, too.

### **d. CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Understanding the cultural background of incidents in the Bible is also helpful in interpretation. For example, Jesus said to Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (hell) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). How can gates prevail? We need to understand, however, that the gates of a city in the Middle East were places where those with power and authority met to make decisions. Thus, "gates" became synonymous with "power" or "authority." With that piece of cultural information, we can easily see that Jesus is saying Satan's power and authority would not defeat Jesus.

Understanding the cultural role of the veil that women in Corinth wore can help us accurately interpret that for us today. And when Paul says women are to remain silent in church (1 Corinthians 14), it was because women sat far from men during the service, so to shout to her husband was disruptive to all. She should wait until she got home to talk to him.

Again, Bible dictionaries, handbooks, commentaries or my "Bible Overview" can be very helpful in understanding many of these things. Even without them, you will still learn a lot if you take time to think about what life must have been like for the people then. Read slowly, deliberately, and thoughtfully.

## **2. THE MAIN IDEA**

In observation it is helpful to pretend the writer of the passage was sitting with you and you could ask him questions. What would you ask? In interpretation we put ourselves in the place of the original readers and ask ourselves what they would have understood the passage to mean. First we talked about the context of the passage in the Bible, in geography, in history and in culture. The original readers would automatically know those things, for they lived in those times. We have to study to put ourselves back where they were. They might also have known the author of the passage or book, or at least known about him from others who did know him. Therefore they'd understand why he wrote. What was the purpose of his recording this? Why did he write it for them to read? What did he want to communicate? Thinking in this way is very important to getting the correct interpretation. When you can grasp the writer's main intent, then everything else can build on that foundation.

One of the most important steps in interpreting a teaching section is to discover the main idea of the section. This is the most important truth a pastor wants the people to remember all week from his sermon. In effect, this is what you are doing when you outline and then title a section. The title should summarize the main idea. The titles of each sections of an outline should relate directly to the main idea. Doing this is very helpful and important for all kinds of Bible literature, but for teaching sections it is a real must.

Think of a good sermon or Bible study you heard recently, or a book you enjoyed -- you should be able to summarize it in one or two sentences. Now think of one which was confusing to you and didn't seem to be about any one thing -- there was no one main idea. Remember this when you are teaching or communicating. Always write down and know your main idea, what you want to convey. Stick to what your main idea is and don't add too much extra information. This is what makes the difference between a good teacher and a not-so-good teacher. Good speakers always have a main idea. If you don't try to read the writer's mind and discover it, you won't be able to correctly interpret the rest of the passage correctly. There is more about that in my book "How To Preach God's Word."

Remember, you have direct access to the very mind of the One who wrote it all, so stay in constant contact during this process through prayer. Do not go further in your Bible study until you can write the main idea of a passage in as few words as possible. You can and probably will adjust and fine tune this as you go, but you must work hard to make sure this is straight. It is the foundation for all you will build as you study the passage - make it true!

## **3. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

So far we've looked at observing – asking questions to see deeper into the text. Then we talked about interpretation. We said first we must look at the context of the passage, geography, history and culture relating to the passage. Next we talked about looking for the main idea. Then we covered the importance of knowing what type of literature we were looking at. Now lets look a little deeper as we continue learning how to interpret the Bible.

### **a. STRUCTURE & GRAMMAR**

In school, we are taught the principles of grammar and sometimes we wonder why it is important to learn those things. An understanding of grammar is very helpful in Bible study. There are some important parts of grammar that we should focus on if we want to interpret God's Word correctly, because grammar deals with the basic structure and relationship of words. These are the foundational building blocks of communication.

An important part of grammar is the meaning and tense of verbs – Look closely at the verbs (the “action” words) in a sentence. Speaking of the promise made by God through the prophets, Paul says it was “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit holiness, by the resurrection of the dead” (Romans 1:3-4). Can you find the two verbs about Christ that are they key words in the whole sentence? (They are “born” and “declared”). When we see these as the key words we know everything else builds upon them. That helps us be able to understand the main idea as well.

The use of prepositions – Even a small part of speech like a preposition (words such as “on” “to” or “for” that are combined with a noun) can influence the meaning of a verse. For example, Romans 3:21-22 says, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.” In the phrase “to all and on all who believe” notice that Paul changes the preposition from “to” to “on.” Can you see the significance of this? When we believe Christ’s righteousness comes TO us, but it also stays ON us forever. The little word “on” brings a lot of important truth to light.

Some of the most common words that show relationship are:

- ALSO** = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- ALTHOUGH** = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- AND** = additional information (look for progression in thought)
- AS** = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- BECAUSE** = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) usually reason or result
- BUT** = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- FINALLY** = last in a series
- FOR** = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) usually reason or result
- HOWEVER** = gives an exception
- IF** = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) condition which requires action
- IN ORDER THAT** = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) gives the purpose
- LIKE** = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- LIKEWISE** = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- MUCH MORE** = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- OTHERWISE** = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1
- THEREFORE** = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) summary, result, conclusion
- TRULY** = emphasized because of being extra important
- YET** = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

## **b. NORMAL, LITERAL INTERPRETATION**

Usual interpretation, also called literal interpretation, means to understand the writer’s original intended meaning based upon the normal and proper use of words and language customary for the day it was written. It means to understand it as the original writer meant it and the first readers interpreted it. That is how we tell the difference between what means exactly what it says and what is a figure of speech. This sounds easier than it sometimes is, especially since the Bible was written thousands of years ago in a different place and culture than we live in now. So how are we to make sure we interpret it as it was meant to be interpreted?

### **1) Use Common Sense**

One of our biggest problems in Bible interpretation is that we think we know what a verse means before we study it. Perhaps we've read it before and formed an opinion, or we've heard someone share their thoughts about it. What we heard or think is usually not wrong, but there is so much more to the verse that we miss if we stop with what we already know. And sometimes what we think it means isn't quite right. So the best thing to do is to set aside any ideas we have and start fresh. Come with a clean, open mind, as if you are seeing it for the first time. That way you will be chewing your own food from the start, not using what someone else started chewing for you!

Use common sense when you interpret Scripture. That's how you'll know the difference between what is normal or usual and what is figurative. I heard about a man who read Jesus' words to "cut off your hand if it offends you" (Matthew 5:30; 18:8; Mark 9:43). One time he used his hand to sin, so he cut it off with a knife! How do we know this isn't what Jesus meant? Common sense tells us so. There is not one example of anyone in the Bible cutting off their hand because of sin. In fact, the Bible says we are to confess our sin and God will forgive it (1 John 1:9). Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and taken care of. This is another way of knowing what the Bible really means – look at the rest of the Bible.

## **2) Take the Word in Its Usual Sense**

The Bible is literature and as such, words must be taken at their face value. Words are to be taken in their usual, normal sense. This is how Jesus understood the Old Testament. He literally interpreted it down to a comma (in Luke 4:14-30, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2) and verb tense ("I Am" in Matthew 22:23-33). This means we aren't to look for hidden, 'spiritualized' meanings everywhere. On the other extreme, we aren't to take it so exact that we miss what the writer had in mind. For instance, in the United States many people eat hot dogs. "Hot dogs" can mean one thing in a strictly literal sense (eating a dog that has been cooked) and another in its normal, usual sense (the name of a popular food item). Use your common sense in determining the meaning. We will talk about figurative language next, so don't worry about that for now. Just read the Bible as you would a letter from a friend! Put yourself in the place of those who first read it.

God revealed His Word over a period of many centuries. Everything He said was true, but He didn't say everything at once. When God revealed His truths to Moses, He knew everything, but He didn't choose to reveal everything to Moses. Instead, He chose to reveal additional truths centuries later – some to Paul, others to John and so on. A parent doesn't tell a child everything the child needs to know right away. Little by little, as they grow over time, a child is able to understand more and more. That's how God revealed His truth in the Bible as well. That's why God's laws get more specific as we read from Genesis to Revelation. God's revelation of Himself and His truth become clearer and clearer as time moved on. From Adam to Abraham to Moses to David to Ezra, God's revealed truth grew in amount and depth. Then the New Testament expands it even further. So don't expect the Old Testament to have as deep and specific teachings as the New. Remember this when you study the Bible as well.

## **3) Take the Word in Its Context**

If a word by itself is unclear (like "hot dogs"), look at the sentence it is used in and let that help determine the meaning. Read the meaning out of the sentence, not into it. Again, put yourself in the writer's place and read his mind.

If you can't tell for sure what a word means by its sentence, then look at the whole paragraph or chapter. Keeping in mind what is the main idea of the verse, chapter, or book will help interpret each specific word as well.

Don't jump to wild conclusions or read in what you assume or have heard. Look at each word clearly and objectively, as if reading it for the first time. Interpret the Bible in its natural sense according to the rules of grammar. The meaning of a word is tied to the sentence by the rules of grammar. Look at it in its context in the Bible. Then see how the word is used elsewhere and what the Bible says about this word or topic. Other parts of the Bible can give insight because the whole Bible always agrees with whatever you are studying. The Bible will never contradict itself.

Quite often, if you look at the first time the word or idea is mentioned in the Bible, you will get a good idea of how it is used elsewhere. When God first introduces a word or concept into Scripture, He does so in such a way that it can be clearly understood, and that meaning carries on when it is used later in the Bible as well.

## **c. FIGURES OF SPEECH**

All forms of literature have figurative language. They add color and flavor to language, making what is said more understandable and also more enjoyable. It's like adding spices to food. The value is the same with or without the spice, but the right spices at the right time can make the food more appealing and easier to eat. God could have created a world that is without color, everything just black and white. He didn't have to create color for life to exist, but it certainly makes everything nicer and more pleasant. That is what figures of speech is to language and communication of God's truth. Often a knowledge of the culture of the times helps interprets these.

The most common figures of speech used in the Bible are:

**RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:** Questions that are asked to make a statement, not to get an answer. In Romans 6:1 Paul asks if we should keep on sinning so God's grace can be seen in forgiving us. It's not that Paul was asking this question because he didn't know the answer. He was using the question to make a statement. Paul uses 6 rhetorical questions in making his point in Romans 3:1-9. They are effective in emphasizing his point and making it clearly understood.

**ALLEGORY:** A story to teach something spiritual from each part recorded. Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory, so is the Christian's Armor in Ephesians 6:11-17.

**METAPHOR:** A figure based on some similarity between two objects, things or beings. One is characterized by what is true of the other. Jesus used this when He said, "I am the door..." (John 10:7-9).

**SIMILE:** This is the smallest of the figures of speech, yet perhaps the most common. It compares two objects, showing something that is true of one is also true of the other. Usually the words "as" or "like" introduce a simile. Isaiah 53:6 says "all we like sheep have gone astray." Sheep are ignorant, helpless and foolish. They can't sense danger or defend themselves. They will wander off to their own destruction unless carefully watched. We are the same way without Jesus.

**PERSONIFICATION:** Actions of people attributed to inanimate objects. "O death, where is your sting" (1 Thessalonians 15:55). "The mountains leapt for joy, the hills clapped their hands."

Figures of speech make God's truth easier to understand and remember. We all know what it means when we hear "The Lord is my Shepherd" and similar figurative language. Look for figures of speech when you study the Bible. Use them when you teach or preach it to others. They add spice and color to our communication and understanding.

**SUMMARY:** We have established that God exists, which is foundational to believing the Holy Spirit, who is God, also exists. Then we showed that the Bible is our source of authority on all things, including the Holy Spirit. We also looked at how to accurately interpret the Bible passages about the Holy Spirit. Now we'll look at basic facts about the Holy Spirit so we can then apply them to our lives today. We'll see He is part of the Trinity, proof that He exists and look at a description of Him.

## **II. THE FACT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **A. HE IS PART OF THE TRINITY**

#### **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE TRINITY**

We know that God exists and that Jesus is God (for proof that God exists, the Bible is God's Word and Jesus is God, go to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/wp-content/uploads/Why-We-Believe-1.pdf>). Does that mean we have two Gods, God the Father and Jesus the Son? No. They are different, although they are the same. As Christians, we believe in the Trinity, that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God. They are three separate personalities but one God. There is only one God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal persons, the same in substance but distinct in person. That's not just hard to envision, it's impossible to fully understand. We must believe it by faith.

Many deny the Trinity. In doing so, they deny the deity and divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Some also claim the Bible is untrue for it clearly teaches God is triune. There are those who believe the Holy Spirit is not as important as Jesus, and Jesus isn't as important as God. But the Bible says they are all equal.

Don Stewart gives a succinct definition of the doctrine of the Trinity on BlueLetterBible.org: "The Bible teaches that there is one eternal God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is the only God that exists. However, within the nature of this one God are three persons, or three centers of consciousness - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are co-equal and co-eternal. They are also distinguishable or distinct from one another. These three distinct Persons are the one God. Everything that is true about God is true about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Augustine, the distinguished Fourth century AD bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was strolling the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea one morning, engaged in deep thought. He was attempting to come to grips with the depths of the doctrine of the Trinity. He was interrupted in his thoughts when he stopped to watch a little fellow running toward the ocean with a bucket. He watched with amusement as the little guy filled his pail with water and hurried back up the beach to pour it into a little hole he had pawed into the sand. Within seconds the sea water soaked into sunbaked, thirsty sand. Then the bishop's eyes followed the little boy down to the ocean again, and then back up to the hole. Once again the little guy poured the water into the hole, and once again the sand swallowed it up greedily. "What are you trying to do?" asked Augustine with a smile. The little boy, a little annoyed at being interrupted in the middle of his busy task, replied, "I'm trying to put the ocean into this hole" Suddenly, it dawned on Augustine that he was behaving much like this little fellow. He was trying to cram the ocean of God's truth into his little box of brains and was having no more success than the little boy with his bucket. If you are confused about the Trinity, you're on the right path! That three can be one and one three doesn't compute mathematically or in our minds, yet both truths are taught

in the Bible. There is only one God, but in the unity of the godhead there are three eternal and coequal persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.

The Trinity is impossible to understand with our limited intelligence. We are a tiny speck on a tiny planet in the midst of the whole universe. The fact that we cannot understand all there is to understand about our Creator should not surprise or alarm us! There are many things our minds cannot understand. This is one of them. But that doesn't mean it isn't true. It would be more surprising if we were able to totally understand all the inner workings of the Godhead. How can we prove the Trinity and the Holy Spirit exist?

**PROOF FROM REASON** If the Trinity isn't true, why would the writers of the Bible make up such a thing? If they were creating a new religion and trying to convince others to believe in their religion, why would they ever make something so hard to understand a key feature? Who would even think of such a thing in the first place? The Trinity is not something man could or would invent on his own. The only explanation is that God revealed this truth to the writers of the Bible and they faithfully recorded what He revealed.

**PROOF FROM THE BIBLE** The Bible records that the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Hebrews 1:8; John 10:27-30; 14:8-10; 17:3-5; Philippians 2:5-11) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4; John 14:16-17, 26). All three are referred to as equal (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Jesus says we are to "baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). He doesn't say in the "names" (plural) but in the "name" (singular). These three are all one. We have proof the Trinity exists.

The Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God. Acts 5:3-4 says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit in verse 3. In verse 4 it says he lied to God – referring to the Spirit. We find the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" or "Spirit of God" more than 35 times in the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:26 we read, "Let us make God in our image," referring to the plurality of the Godhead. Clearly the Holy Spirit is God.

The Bible also says the Holy Spirit and Jesus are equal: "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). The Spirit is equal to the Father and Son (Hebrews 9:14). The Spirit has all the attributes of God the Father. He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-13) and omnipotent (Romans 15:13). There is one God (Exodus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:21; 44:6 but He exists in three Persons (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:18-20; Acts 7:55-56; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:6-10; Ephesians 2:13, 18; John 16:12-15). There really are no good analogies to explain how one is three, yet not divided and separate. Three being one yet separate is nothing we know in nature nor can we imagine it. Therefore, it clearly isn't something the writers, and there were many who refer to the triune God, would make up unless it was revealed to them from God as true.

The beauty of the Trinity is that God has made Himself known to men. Jesus, being God in the flesh, redeemed us. The Spirit speaks to us, enlightens our minds to understand Scripture, convicts us and guides us. God has always been who He is, and in His Triune essence, provides everything the human soul, spirit and body could need or want. And why not? We are made in His image to worship Him in both the things we can know and those incomprehensible attributes we can only perceive by faith.

***Matthew 28:18 Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

*What difference does it make in your life if the Trinity is true or not?*

*Does it bother you that there are some things about God that you can't understand? Why or why not?*

*Although we can't totally understand the Trinity, taking it by faith can bring great assurance. What comfort do you find from the doctrine of the Trinity?*

## **B. PROOF OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVES IN EVERY BELIEVER**

When Nansen started on his Arctic expedition many years ago he took with him a carrier pigeon, strong and fast. After 2 years in the desolation of the Arctic regions, he one day wrote a tiny little message, tied it under the pigeon's wing, and let it loose, to travel 2,000 miles to Norway over ice, snow and death. He took the trembling little bird and flung her up from the ship, up into the icy cold. Three circles she made, and then, straight as an arrow, she shot south: 1,000 miles over ice, 1,000 miles over the frozen wastes of ocean, and at last dropped into the lap of the explorer's wife. She knew, by the arrival of the bird, that it was all right in the dark night of the north. The presence of God's Spirit in our lives assures us that He lives in heaven.

We know the Holy Spirit is God, part of the Trinity. We know He is a Person, not just an impersonal force. But is it true He lives inside of us? Does God really indwell us? If so, we always have His presence and guidance (John 16:8). He is there to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22-23) and empower us with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). He reveals God's truth to us (John 14:26), comforts us (John 14:18, 27), convicts of sin (John 16:8) and helps us in expressing our thoughts in prayers (Romans 8:26). If He is not within us, none of these would happen.

Yet some Christians believe that not all Christians are indwelt by the Spirit. Others believe that certain leaders have 'more' of the Spirit than others and can perform special acts. They even believe these men can pass on the Holy Spirit to others. People then elevate those who claim this and give them the credit and worship that belongs to God alone. They steal His glory for themselves! We are all equal in God's sight. The Spirit fills and ministers to all of us equally.

**PROOF FROM THE BIBLE** The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:13). This is literally Jesus's presence in us by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27). The Holy Spirit is always in every believer from the moment of salvation. How much we let Him control and lead us depends on our allowing Him to fill us completely (Ephesians 5:19). There is never a mention of some having 'more' of the Spirit than others, or being above other Christians or having the ability to pass on the Spirit to those whom they choose.

In the Old Testament the filling of the Spirit was rare and was usually related to the ability to serve in some particular area. Undoubtedly, the Spirit of God was behind the work of the inspiration of the Old Testament, and those who wrote Scripture were guided infallibly in what they wrote (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11). The Spirit of God in the Old Testament gave men wisdom (Genesis 41:38-40; Numbers 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13). The Holy Spirit also gave men special skills in the Old Testament, such as the tailors for the priestly garments (Exodus 28:3) and the workmen who built the tabernacle (Exodus 31:3; 35:30-35). In the case of Samson, the Holy Spirit's filling gave him superhuman strength (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

Today He indwells every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), produces the fruit (good works) in believers (Galatians 5:2-16) and baptizes

(identifies) all Christians into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He is the One Who restrains sin in general (2 Thessalonians 2:7), convicts unbelievers of sin (John 16:8-9) and seals (guarantee of assurance) believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He guides and directs believers and teaches and reminds us of God's Word (John 14:26). He gives spiritual gifts to each believer and through gifted believers ministers to the whole Body (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

We are commanded to be filled (controlled) by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) by continually being in total submission to God (Galatians 5:16, 25) and not allowing any sin or disobedience in our lives (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Sinning against God is defined in the Bible as grieving the Spirit (Isaiah 63:10-11; Ephesians 4:30). All these are strong proofs that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus. But there is one additional proof.

**PROOF FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE** Those who are Christians can affirm from personal experience the change in them from before to after salvation. There is no accounting for this other than God Himself living inside and ministering to all our needs as promised. It is not a transformation we could have made on our own; it had to come from a source outside us, and that is God Himself through His indwelling Spirit.

***John 14:16-17 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 14:26 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.***

*How do you know God's Spirit lives in you?*

*What would be different if He didn't?*

*What can you do better to hear and follow Him today?*

## **C. DESCRIPTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **MEET THE HOLY SPIRIT**

In many Christian circles the Holy Spirit is either neglected, forgotten, or misunderstood. The One given to unite the body of Christ is often the center of controversy. Some overemphasize the Holy Spirit to the extent of deviating from Bible truth. Other Christians relegate Him to a place of little importance. When is the last time you heard a sermon just about the Holy Spirit, or even the Trinity? The late Dr. A. W. Tozer, author and pastor, said, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference." We don't want to be part of the ones who ignore Him, but neither do we want to be among those teaching false doctrine. It can be a hard balance to maintain. This is a first in a series of blogs to focus on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. My purpose is to correct error while also encouraging true understanding and appreciation of all He does for us.

Without a doubt the Holy Spirit has been the most misunderstood member of the Triune Godhead. Throughout the centuries, the Holy Spirit's ministry, nature, and even deity has been questioned and speculated over. Theologians and commentators from every denomination have written volumes of books declaring who the Holy Spirit is and trying to ascertain His moving and operations within the body of Christ. Yet, because our knowledge is incomplete, so will be our explanations,

because God has chosen to keep some things to Himself. But there are enough truths He has revealed to let us know what we need to about the Holy Spirit.

Explaining the Holy Spirit is like trying to draw a picture of the soul, or weighing a thought, or explaining an emotion. It can't be accurately described by words. They fall far short. It's like the sun. We can't look at the sun, for we aren't equipped for it. But we can experience the benefits of the sun's rays. The same is true of the Spirit. We can't see Him, but we can experience His blessings in our lives. We may not be able to explain the working of the Holy Spirit, but we can experience the Spirit's power in our own life and ministry.

Not only does He physically keep from being seen, but He does that spiritually as well. The Spirit is mentioned 90 times in the Old Testament and 261 in the New. However, Jesus is mentioned 8 times as often because He is the focus of God's plan of Redemption. The purpose of the Spirit is to focus on Jesus and bring glory to Him (John 16:13-14; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:13-14). He does not focus on Himself or bring worship to Himself. Yet some today elevate the Holy Spirit above God and Jesus, focusing on the Spirit and worshipping Him more than the others. They have developed a cult-like focus on the Spirit, when that is not His role at all.

Jesus described the Spirit as a wind (John 3:7-8). In fact, the Greek word "Spirit" comes from the same root as "wind" – Pneuma (as in pneumonia and pneumatic, both having to do with air/wind). The old translation, "Holy Ghost" has added to the misunderstanding through the years. There is a strong similarity between the Spirit and the wind. You can't see the wind but you can feel the results of its work. It is unpredictable, exists everywhere, is continually in motion and can't be controlled by man, yet He is essential to our spiritual life (John 20:21-22; Acts 2:20). We cannot see Him but we can know Him by what He does. When we are filled with the Spirit others can't see the Spirit in us, but they can see the results of what the Spirit does. Purpose of the Holy Spirit is to make Christlike (John 16:13-14; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:13-14)

***John 3:5-8 Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."***

*Can others see the Spirit working through you?*

*What results of the Spirit are evident in your life?*

*Think of someone who clearly shows evidence of God's Spirit working in them. What can you learn from them?*

*What can you do to better allow God's Spirit to blow through your life, leaving evidence for others of His presence and work?*

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT: PERSON OR POWER SOURCE?**

When one accepts the reality that a God exists, the next step is for them to understand that God is a Person, not just a force like "The Force be with you." To many, God is just a force, an energy source, a 'Mother Nature,' an unfeeling power. Were He just an energy force, there would be no possibility of a personal relationship or intimacy with Him. He would be a power source to use for our own self-centered needs, and unfortunately that is how many Christians see Him. Some Christians try to manipulate His power to lift them above their difficulties and give them a better life. They want to use the Spirit to make them feel good and carry them to victory over whatever they face, similar to having a magic genie in a bottle they can rub and wish for whatever they want. They end

up chasing manifestations, emotions or charismatic leaders instead of Jesus. This is very similar to New Age where followers learn to channel an impersonal energy source for their own benefit. All this originated in ancient Hinduism and just comes repackaged in more socially acceptable forms in the New Age movement and in some churches. But it is all wrong, Satan's counterfeit of the truth.

How can we show that not only is there a Holy Spirit, but that He is a person? First of all, we must understand what personality is. Personality means there is a mind that can think and reason, a free will that can make moral choices, and emotions which can feel. Humans have these, but where did they come from? We didn't just develop them out of nothing. They had to have a source, and that was God. As a Person, God has a mind with which to think and reason. That is the creative source behind everything working so perfectly and fitting together so well in the universe, everything from the tiniest atom to a complex human being to the largest galaxy. Such a perfect, intricate system has 'design' and 'intelligence' written all over it. He also has a free will to make choices and emotions because He feels joy and sorrow, love and hate. Just like us.

The Holy Spirit also is a Person, a "He," not an "it" (John 14:17; 16:13). He has a mind and intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Romans 8:27). An impersonal force does not think, know or search things out. He has a will, volition (Ephesians 1:17; 1 Corinthians 12:11). He can make choices and decisions. Impersonal forces do not make choices about how to distribute spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11). He also has emotions, sensibilities (Romans 15:30; 8:26). He can be hurt and offended (Ephesians 4:30). You cannot hurt an impersonal force.

The Spirit performs many activities that show personality: teaching (John 14:26), guiding (Acts 8:29; Romans 8:14; ), striving (Genesis 6:3), speaking (John 16:13-14; Acts 13:2; Revelation 2:7), interceding (Romans 8:26), convicting (John 16:8), reminding (John 14:26), appointing (Acts 20:29), sending (Acts 13:2), comforting (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15), working (John 14:26), leading (Galatians 5:18), helping (John 14:26; 15:26), testifying (John 15:26), being resisted (Acts 7:51) and lied to (Acts 5:3-4).

The Holy Spirit is listed as equal to the Father and the Son, two unmistakable persons (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:18-20; Acts 7:55-56; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:6-10; Ephesians 2:13, 18; John 16:12-15). A force does not share a singular "name" with personal agents.

This truth was recognized early in Christian history and was formalized in councils like Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), emphasizing the Spirit's divinity and personhood against views that reduced it to a subordinate force. Satan is bringing the old lie that the Spirit is only an impersonal force around again today and many Christians are falling for it! It is blasphemy because it denies the deity of the Holy Spirit. It is dangerous because it keeps man from having a personal relationship with God through His Spirit. It is spiritually damaging because it turns man's focus on trying to manipulate the Spirit for his own benefit instead of submitting to His guidance and leading. It is demonic because it takes glory from the godhead and gives it to men who supposedly have insight on how to maneuver God's power for their own ends.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century French inventor Louis Daguerre was one of the pioneers of photography. In those early days, he could take a picture by exposing a metal plate to light. When the plate was taken out of the camera, however, the image soon disappeared. Daguerre tried many ways to keep the image from fading, but nothing worked. One day he found a plate that had been left in a closet full of chemicals, and to his amazement the image was bright and sharp. He took other pictures, put the plates in that closet, and got the same results. He didn't know what was causing the image to remain, so he kept the pictures in the closet and began removing items one at a time. Even after everything else was removed, the images remained on the plates. Finally, Daguerre discovered that some mercury had been spilled in the closet. Further experiments proved that mercury vapor was fixing the image on the plate.

The Holy Spirit does in you and me what the mercury vapor did to that photographic plate. He helps us keep Christ in focus. He comforts (John 14:16, 26; 15:25; 16:7), He teaches (John 14:26), He encourages (John 14:16-17), He guide and He directs us in Christlikeness (John 16:13; 14:26; Galatians 5:16,18). Our part is to be careful not to grieve (Ephesians 4:30) or quench (1 Thessalonians 5:19) Him. As we obey the Holy Spirit, He will keep before us a sharp image of Christ. Given a chance, the Spirit will work in us to develop the clear image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:29). No inanimate, impersonal force can do that, only the living Spirit of God.

***2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.***

*Is God's Spirit living in you?*

*Are you becoming more and more Christlike as you allow God's Spirit to transform you into the image of Jesus?*

*Thank Him for His patience and work in your life.*

## **HOLY SPIRIT POWER**

A. J. Gordon, one of the founders of Gordon Conwell Divinity School, tells of being out walking and looking across a field at a house, and there beside the house was what looked like a man pumping furiously at one of those hand pumps. As Gordon watched, the man continued to pump at a tremendous rate; he seemed absolutely tireless, pumping on and on, up and down without ever slowing in the slightest, much less stopping. Truly it was a remarkable sight, so Gordon started to walk toward it. As he got closer, he could see it was not a man at all, but a wooden figure painted to look like a man. The arm that was pumping so rapidly was hinged at the elbow and the hand was wired to the pump handle. The water was pouring forth, but not because the figure was pumping it. You see, it was an artesian well, and the water was pumping the man! The water moved the arm, not the other way around.

Sometimes when we look at our lives and see the change that has come since we came to Jesus we give ourselves credit for what has been happening. But that is not where credit is due. It is not our power, but God's power through His Spirit that is working within us. All we have to do is keep our hand on the handle, the power comes from Him, not us.

We know the Holy Spirit is a Person, not just an impersonal power source. But that doesn't mean He doesn't have power and isn't powerful. He is our source of power (Romans 15:13), but He is also personal. Often this power is misunderstood as being something that can remove our problems and give us a better life (according to our definition of 'better'). Some want to harness this power to give us "our best life now" but the Spirit can't be controlled or manipulated for our selfish benefit.

Mary was impregnated by God's power through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Genesis 1:2). She had no power to do it herself. We have no power in ourselves. We "receive" power because on our own we are powerless to live the life God wants us to live (Acts 1:8). Everything we are or do is because of God's Spirit working in us and through us. On our own, we are powerless.

According to Philippians 2:7, Christ "emptied" (Greek Kenosis) Himself in the Incarnation, as described "by taking the form of a servant". It signifies his voluntary renunciation of divine privileges and glory to live fully human, yet without ceasing to be God, He serves as a model for believers to empty themselves of pride and self-will to follow God's will and live in the power of the Spirit, as Jesus did. The greatest example of the power of the Holy Spirit is raising Jesus from the dead, which is proof God will "give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (Romans 8:10-11, 23)

In the **Old Testament** the Holy Spirit was the power behind Samson's strength (Judges 14:6 15:14) and Saul's ability to lead (1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6). He enabled David to kill a bear, a lion and Goliath (1 Samuel 16:13). He was the force behind Isaac's birth to elderly parents (Galatians 4:29). The Messiah is promised His power as well (Isaiah 11:2).

In the **New Testament** there are two words for power with vastly different meanings. One is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get our word 'dynamite.' It refers to strength, power and ability and is used of the power to perform miracles and to resist armies and enemies. The other word translated 'power' is *exousia* which refers to the right to act, authority or right to do as one chooses.

In Jesus we have both **power** (δυναμις *dunamis* - Luke 9:1; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:33; 6:8 Ephesians 1:18-23; Hebrews 2:14-15) and **authority** (εξουσια *exousia* - Luke 10:1,17-20; Matthew 10:1,8; Mark 3:15; 6:7; I John 4:4). Power comes from the Holy Spirit within (Luke 1:35; 4:14; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13, 19; Ephesians 3:16), authority comes from our relationship as a child of Jesus (John 1:12). A policeman has both authority (badge) and power (gun or club). Both come from a source outside himself, as do ours (Colossians 12:9-10). We need both of these in our battle against Satan, demons and sin.

Satan also has power (Luke 10:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24; 1 Peter 3:22) and authority (Luke 4:6; Acts 26:10; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12). Demons have these, also (Revelation 9:3,10,19; Colossians 1:16; 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22). God's power and authority is superior to that which Satan and demons have. Men without Jesus do not have power or authority anywhere near to Satan and his demons, though.

Men often judge spiritual power by outward display and noisy demonstrations, by signs and wonders, great emotional displays, loud preaching or testifying or by public speaking in tongues or prophesying. But God's greatest works are done quietly and without great public display. The silent way is God's way! It is predominant in all of the great operations of nature and grace. Gravitation works silently; and the greatest trees grow noiselessly. Evaporation, which takes up three billion tons of water every minute – enough to supply all the rivers of the world – works quietly. God's spiritual power, too, is best displayed not in the fire and in the earthquake, but in the "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-13). To His humble, yet willing servants here below, God "increases strength" (Isaiah 40:29) and despite our weakness, unleashes through us the silent force of His omnipotence! He silently but surely changes us from within – not in great power encounters or displays, but through the Spirit's daily working in us to make us more like Jesus. That's where the real power is!

***Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***

*Where have you seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work within you to help you grow spiritually?*

*Where have you seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work at work through you to serve Him and minister for Him?*

*Ask God to help you be more aware today of His Presence working in and through you.*

**SUMMARY** We have seen basic facts about the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity, proof of His existence and a description of Him. Now we'll focus on how He functioned in the past as well as in our lives today.

## **COMMON HOLY SPIRIT ERRORS CORRECTED - 1**

God has revealed His truth in the Bible, but Satan counterfeits and misquotes God to bring confusion. He did this to Eve (Genesis 3:1) and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). He still does it today (1 Timothy 4:1). The more we are ignorant of the truth of Scripture the easier it is for our enemy to spread his lies and counterfeits. He does not deny God's truth, but he does twist and misinterpret it. A good counterfeit is more dangerous than an obvious fake. One of the main areas of teaching where this is true is concerning the Holy Spirit. Let's take a quick look God's truth that counters some common errors.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON, NOT A FORCE.** We are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27) and we are personal, not an impersonal force. Therefore, the God who made us (a very personal, creative act) must be personal as well. Since the Spirit and the Father are equal, then the Spirit is personal as well. As such the Holy Spirit has mind and intellect (John 14:26), emotions and feelings (Ephesians 4:30) and a free will (Acts 13:2).

**THE HOLY SPIRIT IS PART OF THE TRINITY, THE TRIUNE GOD.** A large denomination, the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI – 24 million members), or, as they are more popularly known, "Oneness Pentecostals," deny the doctrine of the tri-unity of God. A dozen smaller Pentecostal denominations do so also. They are exclusively monotheistic, erroneously claiming that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same Person. They deny that there are three Persons in the Godhead, allowing only different modes (thus, "modalism"), or "masks," of the one Deity. This false doctrine is called "Modalism," and it is an ancient error, popularized 200 years after Jesus. Modalists today say Jesus is also the Father and the Spirit. Thus, Jesus in His human nature prayed to Himself as God the Father in Gethsemane (John 17). They baptize only in the name of Jesus, not the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The Bible records that the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Hebrews 1:8; John 10:27-30; 14:8-10; 17:3-5; Philippians 2:5-11) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4; John 14:16-17, 26). All three are referred to as equal (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Modalism is a dangerous doctrinal heresy.

**RESULTING ERRORS** When there is error about the Person of Christ, other errors abound. And so, to modalism has been added the necessity of baptismal regeneration, and the requirement to speak in tongues for salvation, both denying that salvation comes by faith alone. The fear of losing salvation motivates some to put their faith in emotional experiences to give them assurance of salvation. The truth is that salvation can never be lost because believers are eternally sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14; John 10:28-29; Romans 8:30).

**THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS ALL EQUALLY FROM THE MOMENT OF SALVATION.** It is wrong to think that some have a higher measure of the Spirit or can transfer Him to others. It is just as wrong to think that something must be done after salvation to receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:13). This is Jesus's presence in us by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27). The Holy Spirit is not owned or controlled by any man. He is God Himself, given equally to all who believe (John 14:16-17; Acts 2:38-39).

**THE SPIRIT BRINGS SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS, NOT GUARENTEED MATERIALISM.** It is not true that God's blessing is seen only in power, health and wealth. Most of God's followers in the Bible lacked at least one of these. The Bible warns against materialism and never promises health, wealth and power to Christians (Matthew 6:19-21; 13:22; 19:21-24; Luke 6:24-26; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; John 16:33; 1 Timothy 6:9-10). (This topic will be continued in the next blog.)

***John 7:37-39 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom***

***those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.***

*What difference does it make in your life that the Spirit is a Person and not just a force?*

*Do you believe the Holy Spirit is an equal Person in the Trinity? How would you show someone this from the Bible?*

## **COMMON HOLY SPIRIT ERRORS CORRECTED - 2**

It the previous blog we looked at some common errors about the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit is a force and not a person, He is not part of the Trinity, He brings material blessings and some have more of the Spirit than others. We showed God's truth about each of these. This blog we will look at some more lies about the Spirit and see what God's truth is.

**HIGHLY EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES ARE NOT NECESSARY PROOFS OF THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE.** There is nothing wrong with expressing God-given emotions, but our experience must be based on truth (John 4:24). Many times, the Bible says "we know" but doesn't say "we feel." God's Spirit talks to us in our mind (Romans 12:1-2), in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13). Loud noises, jumping, dancing, falling, losing control, shouting out of control, etc. are not necessarily manifestations of the spirit for what we say and do must be under our control (1 Corinthians 14:15, 32). All things must be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). Paul criticized the immature Corinthian believers for their lack of spiritual growth despite the manifestation of spiritual gifts among them (1 Corinthians 3:3). The Spirit can produce those things when there is a godly reason and God is glorified, but to draw attention one's self or put faith in them in order to prove one's spirituality is wrong. The purpose of the Spirit is not to lift us up or focus on us but to focus on Jesus and bring glory to Him (John 16:13-14; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:13-14). He does not focus on Himself or bring attention or worship to Himself. The fruit of the Spirit is love, self-control, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23). Look for these signs of the Spirit's work. Do not interpret Scripture in light of someone's experience, interpret their experience in light of Scripture.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT GIVEN TO REPLACE SCRIPTURE.** Do not elevate dreams, prophecies or visions above the authority of Scripture. These must line up with God's Word and be subject to it; they do not replace the Bible. Do not follow men, no matter what they say, follow only God and His Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-2). Even if an angel directly tell you something not in Scripture, don't believe it (Galatians 1:8). In fact, one of the main reasons God sent His Spirit is to reveal to us His truth written in Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; John 16:13).

**DON'T WORSHIP THE HOLY SPIRIT, BUT DON'T IGNORE HIM EITHER.** We saw the Holy Spirit is not to be worshipped and magnified above other members of the Trinity, but neither is He to be ignored. Perhaps in reaction to those who over-emphasize the Spirit, some Christians are very ignorant of His role and His function in their lives. Today He indwells every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), produces good fruit (good works) in believers (Galatians 5:2-16) and baptizes (identifies) all Christians into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He is the One Who restrains sin in general (2 Thessalonians 2:7), convicts unbelievers of sin (John 16:8-9) and seals (guarantee of assurance) believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He guides and directs believers and teaches and reminds us of God's Word (John 14:26). He gives spiritual gifts to each believer and through gifted believers ministers to the whole Body (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, we must avoid extremes. We must give Him the honor and glory due Him as God, but not elevate Him above the other members of the Trinity or above

Scripture. Finding balance is very important, and that only comes from a thorough understanding of God's Word. That's where all truth lies.

***John 16:13-14 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you.***

*Has God convicted you of any of these errors about the Holy Spirit?*

*If so, what truth must you follow instead?*

*Pray and thank God for His Spirit to teach you. Pray for anyone you know who is believing a lie of the enemy about the Holy Spirit.*

### **III. THE FUNCTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We have established that the Holy Spirit exists and that He is God. We have described who He is and corrected common misunderstandings about Him. Now we will focus on what He does, on His works and actions.

#### **A. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

##### **THE SPIRIT'S DIFFERENT ROLES IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

One of the reasons we have confusion and wrong doctrine about the Holy Spirit is that we don't clearly understand how His roles differ from the Old Testament to the New. Reading Old Testament verses about the Spirit back then and applying them to us today will bring error, confusion and false teaching. For example, before Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon those who needed Him when they needed Him. He wasn't in all believers all the time like He is with us today. He came for special needs and left when they were accomplished. Bezalel being filled with the Spirit to have the wisdom and skill needed to build the Tabernacle is an example (Exodus 31:1-5).

If we think this is the way God works with us today we are wrong. It can cause us to incorrectly feel we have to do something after salvation to gain the Spirit. Or we may believe we can lose the Spirit and cause us to live in fear of that happening. Because of this, some come up with unbiblical 'proof' we have the Spirit's presence by elevating certain emotions or spiritual gifts. All of this takes down a bad track in our spiritual lives.

The Holy Spirit was temporarily given to believers in Old Testament times as they had need (Numbers 11:29). . He came upon Moses and the Jewish elders to help them lead the people (Numbers 11:25, 29). That also happened with Gideon (Judges 6:34). It wasn't uncommon to read of Him coming upon or leaving various judges like Samuel and even King Saul. When Elisha replaced Elijah, he asked for the Spirit that worked in Elijah to be in him, even doubly as powerful (2 Kings 2:9, 15). David himself, after his sin with Bathsheba, wrote in Psalm 51: 10-12 *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."* He knew he needed God's Spirit to help him lead the people of Israel.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:13). This is literally Jesus's presence in us by the Holy

Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27). The Holy Spirit is always in every believer from the moment of salvation. How much we let Him control and lead us depends on our allowing Him to fill us completely (Ephesians 5:19). God gives the Spirit “without limit” (John 3:34). Therefore, in the Old Testament the Spirit temporarily came upon those who needed Him when He was needed. After Jesus, believers all receive the Spirit at the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:13) and He never leaves us.

The Holy Spirit came on the early Christians during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which means “50” (Leviticus 23:16) because it was 50 days after the wave-offering of the “Firstfruits” (Leviticus 23:10,15). Leviticus 23 describes the 7 annual feasts which God declared the people were to observe. These started with the Passover and culminated with the Feast of Tabernacles. They are also symbolic pictures showing the major events of history from eternity past to eternity future. Pentecost was in the middle, the anniversary of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. That was accompanied by thunder, lightning and smoke (Exodus 19:16-18). When the Holy Spirit came to the upper room, there were fiery tongues and a mighty wind (Acts 2:2-3). As Christians we are now the Body (1 Corinthians 12:27) and Bride (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-9) of Christ, not just His servants like in the Old Testament (Leviticus 25:55, etc.). That is why we all receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation and never lose Him as long as we live.

We never have to do anything special to receive Him. There is no post-salvation experience to become indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We never have to wonder if He lives in us or not – He always does. There is no way of getting ‘more’ of Him. And it’s impossible to have ‘less’ of Him or lose Him entirely. Totally impossible. We don’t need to live in fear or uncertainty. We should never try to do things to manipulate God to give us the Spirit or more of the Spirit. No certain people or leaders have a special ‘in’ with the Spirit that the rest of us don’t have. We are all as close to Him as we allow ourselves to be by submitting to God’s will and living for Jesus in all we think, say and do. Anyone that says anything different is wrong. Those who persist in teaching such things are false teachers.

***Romans 8:9-11 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.***

*Do you ever have fear that you have lost the Spirit’s presence? If so, thank God that can never happen.*

*Do you try to do things so God will be pleased with you and give you more power and help? If so, apologize to God for trying to earn something He has already given for free.*

#### HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS IN SALVATION

PRECONVERSION	CONVERSION	POSTCONVERSION
RESTRAIN 2 Thessalonians 2:7 REPROVE, CONVICT John 16:7-10	REGENERATION Titus 3:5 INDWELLING 1 Corinthians 6:19 SEALING Ephesians 4:30	FULLNESS Ephesians 5:18 SANCTIFICATION 2 Corinthians 3:18 ILLUMINATION 1 Corinthians 2:12 PRAYER Romans 8:26-27

## **B. BEFORE SALVATION**

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT'S CONVICTION OF SIN**

We talk a lot about the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers and that is good. However, the Holy Spirit also ministers to those who are not believers. There are two actions He performs: He restrains sin (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and He convicts of sin (John 16:7-10).

First let look at how He **restrains sin**. *2 Thessalonians 2:7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the One who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.* Picture a room full of children with no adult in the room. Things can get out of control quickly. But if an adult enters the room and sits quietly in the back things will settle down. The presence of the adult warns the children and if any do get out of hand, the adult will take action to keep things under control. We may think our world today is chaotic and out of control, and in many ways it is. But if God's Presence through the Holy Spirit wasn't present keeping things from getting even worse and keeping some semblance of order, life would be almost impossible. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world today. When the church is taken away so will the Spirit be taken and then literally all hell will break loose (2 Thessalonians 2:7). That's the Tribulation. Thank God we live now and not then!

Also, the Spirit **convicts of sin**. *John 16:6-11 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.* The Spirit is like a prosecuting attorney who helps the government prove a person guilty of wrongdoing. He brings the evidence and points out the truth in clear words.

God does that in unbelievers through the Holy Spirit. People must realize they are lost before they can be saved. The word "convict" means "to cause to see." Unless God shows us our sin and need of Him we won't realize it. Christians aren't smarter than unbelievers, we are the recipients of the Spirit's conviction. That's God's sovereignty. We can't take credit for our salvation because He chose us and showed us our need of Him. But yes, those who reject Him are still guilty of rejection. How can these both be true? The same way God's sovereignty and man's free will are both true. Each is 100% accurate, but in our limited understanding we can't see how. God can and does, so we trust Him and believe each of them. Enough of that, back to what the Spirit does now.

John 16:6-11 says the Spirit convicts in 3 areas: sin, righteousness and judgment. First, the Spirit convicts unbelievers of **sin** before salvation. He pricks our conscious or speaks guilt or shame to our hearts. The greatest sin we are guilty of is not believing in Jesus. Without the convincing work of the Spirit, we wouldn't see our need for Jesus. That's why a person can hear the gospel many times until all of a sudden it makes sense, like they are hearing it for the first time, and they come to Jesus.

The Spirit also convicts unbelievers of **righteousness**. We see clearly how we stand compared to Jesus. He becomes our standard, the One we measure ourselves against, and we fail terribly.

Third, He convicts us of **judgment**. It makes sense to us and it becomes clear that Jesus died on the cross to pay my sin, for all sin because none is worse than any other. Every sin deserves punishment. We know we are under judgment but Jesus took that penalty for us. Thus, the way is open for us to accept His free gift of salvation.

When looking for a new house a good real estate agent will show you the benefits of the house and how it will meet your needs. He creates a desire in you to make the house yours. Then he shows you how that can happen – where to sign and it’s all yours! That’s what the Holy Spirit does in showing us our need of Jesus. We saw in an earlier blog that rejecting this awareness makes us accountable and, unless repentance comes later, is the sin God will never forgive because we never ask for forgiveness of it (Mark 3:29).

Sometimes a court of law may wrongly convict a person of a crime they didn’t commit, but that will never happen with the Spirit. He is always true and right. Without His conviction we wouldn’t ever come to Him. A heckler once interrupted an evangelist who was talking about our need for Jesus to remove our sin. “You tell me about the burden of sin. I feel none. How heavy is it? Eighty pounds? Ten pounds?” The preacher asked him: “Tell me, if you laid four hundred pounds’ weight on a corpse, would it feel the load?” “No, because it is dead,” replied the critic. The preacher said: “That spirit, too, is dead which feels no load of sin.” It’s only when the Spirit convicts that we are aware of our sin. Thank God that He does convict you of sin, that you do feel a load. If you don’t feel any load of sin, ask Him to make your spirit alive so you can feel and remove your sin.

***Acts 2:37 "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"***

*Do you remember when the Spirit first showed you your need of Jesus? Thank Him for it. Don't take credit for being smart enough to come to Jesus, thank Him for choosing and drawing you.*

## **C. DURING SALVATION**

### **WHEN DOES A BELIEVER RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

A man once went to visit some friends in the English countryside. For years they had lived in an old-fashioned, rundown building. To his surprise, he discovered that the house had been completely remodeled. The people had installed new lights, an electric stove, and many other pieces of modern equipment. But he was even more surprised to see the lady of the house still using a kerosene stove for cooking and oil lamps for lighting. After greeting him, she said, “Don’t look so confused. We’ve had a great change here, but we just haven’t turned on the power yet.”

The application to believers is clear: every saved sinner has had a great change in his standing before God and has received the indwelling Holy Spirit. Yet many haven’t even begun to tap His blessed resources for holy living. He takes up residence in us at the moment of salvation. There are some Biblical terms that must be understood in order to understand what the Bible says about when this happens.

**INDWELT BY THE SPIRIT.** The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells believers immediately upon salvation as a seal of ownership and a guarantee of eternal life (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). Key evidence includes personal conviction of sin, transformed desires toward godliness, and the internal assurance that one is a child of God. If anyone does not have God’s Spirit they are not a believer (1 Corinthians 12:13). There is no such thing as a believer without the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Proof of the Spirit’s presence in our lives is the conviction we feel when we sin (John 16:8-11) and the growing desire to obey God and resist sin (Romans 7:18-25). The Spirit shows us our need of the Father (Romans 8:15) and produces the fruit of the spirit such as love, joy, peace and self-control in us (Galatians 5:22-23).

**BAPTIZED IN THE SPIRIT.** 1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches: *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”*

Paul is affirming that all the Christians in Corinth, even the immature and those living in sin (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 6:12-20; etc.), had been baptized into the Spirit at salvation. Paul says we “were” – past tense, a one-time event at the moment of salvation (Acts 10:44). Baptism in the Spirit is a one-time event that places us into the Body of Christ. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 10:1ff; 12:13; 6:19; Ephesians 4:5; Romans 5:5). This makes us part of the Bride of Christ, which defines our unique love-relationship with Him for all eternity. This is only true of believers from the cross to the rapture. What a special privilege we have in this! However just because the Holy Spirit lives in us doesn’t mean we allow Him to fill us and fully minister to us. For that to happen we need to be filled by the Spirit.

**FILLED BY THE SPIRIT.** Being indwelt (or baptized) by the Spirit is a one-time event at the moment of salvation, but being filled (or controlled) is something that has to happen repeatedly, whenever we sin or disobey. Those who are Christians are commanded to do it: *Ephesians 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* Both drunkenness and the Holy Spirit are strong influences that work within us. Alcohol leads to unrestrained and irrational license, transforming the person into an animal, but the Spirit leads to restrained and rational moral behavior, transforming the person into Christ’s likeness.

To “be filled” is a command in the Greek, not a suggestion. It is in the plural form as is “do not get drunk.” Both refer to everyone, all of us. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a special privilege for some but is for every believer. We all have the Spirit from the moment of salvation, but we don’t always let Him fill or control us. The command to “be filled” is in the passive voice which means we don’t do it, but we allow it to happen to us. It is in the present tense which means it is continuous in the present, now and in the future as well. The Greek tense makes it clear is it not a onetime event, but a continuing action, done repeatedly as needed. It is a command to be continually open to allow God to fill us with his Spirit.

Paul’s next words prove this is what he means. Ephesians 5:19-21 says the outworking of being filled will result in speaking and singing Psalm and spiritual songs, giving thanks and submitting to each other. These aren’t things we can do in our own strength. Paul doesn’t use speaking in tongues or some other manifestation as proof of the Spirit’s filling. This only happens by voluntarily submitting to the control of the Holy Spirit and obeying God’s Word as He speaks to us through the Spirit within us. The more we are open to Him, the more He will fill us (2 Kings 4:6). Too many today want to use the Spirit to bring attention and glory to themselves but we are called to let the Spirit use us to bring attention and glory to Jesus.

John’s parents were filled (Luke 1:41, 67), as were the disciples (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52), Peter (Acts 4:8), Stephen (Acts 6:5; 7:55; 11:24), Barnabas (Acts 11:24) and Paul (Acts 9:17; 13:9). One of the qualifications for being a deacon was being filled (Acts 6:3). This same power source is available to guide and help us today.

We are commanded to let the Spirit fill and control us, not something else like alcohol (Ephesians 5:18). Be sensitive to His leading, depend on His guidance and strength and not your own, surrender your will to His, give Him all of you that you can. Walk daily by the leading of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). To walk by the Spirit is to live with moment-by-moment dependency on and sensitivity to the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Unconfessed sin will make the Spirit sad (Ephesians 4:30 *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*) and quench His work in your life (1 Thessalonians 5:19: *“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire”*). He doesn’t leave, but neither does He assert Himself. He won’t force Himself where He is not wanted. When you sin, you don’t need to be indwelt or baptized in the Spirit again, for He will never leave. But you do need to resubmit to His control and filling.

***Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit"***

*What change has the indwelling or baptism of the Spirit made in your life?*

*What is different when you are filled or not filled with the Spirit?*

*Thank God for His Spirit and all He does in your life.*

**JESUS LIVES IN ME BY THE SPIRIT**

When I was a young boy people would talk about "Jesus living in my heart." It was hard for me to picture that. Did He shrink down to a small size? Should I feel Him there? What was He doing all the time? Somewhere along the line I was taught that it is actually the Holy Spirit living in me that represents Jesus. But remember, they are all One in the Trinity anyway.

This brings up the whole issue of how much attention the Spirit should get. We talk about the Father and the Son often, but the purpose of the Spirit is not to draw attention to Himself but to focus on Jesus. He ministers within us, but glorifies the Father and Son, not Himself. *John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

The Spirit is called "the Spirit of God's Son" (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15-17), "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9-10) and "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). The same Spirit who enabled Jesus to do what He did on earth is available to help us do what God wants us to do. All we do is by His strength. A mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress at the piano, bought tickets for a Paderewski performance. When the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway waiting on stage. Soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away. When eight o'clock arrived, the spotlights came on, the audience quieted, and only then did they notice the boy up on the bench, innocently picking out, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." His mother gasped, but before she could retrieve her son, the master appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard. He whispered to the boy, "Don't quit--keep playing." Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized. In our lives, unpolished though we may be, it is the Master who surrounds us and whispers in our ear, time and again, "Don't quit--keep playing." And as we do, he augments and supplements until a work of amazing beauty is created.

Charles Swindoll says that in times of loneliness and desperation, the Spirit prompts hope and encouragement, as He helped Elijah at Mt Carmel (1 Kings 19:11-12). In times of threatening fears, the Spirit prompts calm and determination and courage, as He helped Paul (Acts 10:22-24; Philippians 1:21). In times of potential danger and disaster, the Spirit prompts inner reassurance, as when Paul's ship was about to sink (Acts 27:9-10). And in times of great sorrow and pain, the Spirit ministers grace to us, as seen with Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-8).

The French painter Emile Ranouf has painted a picture of an old man dressed in a fisherman's garb, seated in a boat, with a little girl beside him. Both the elderly gentleman and the child, perhaps his grand-daughter, have their hands on a huge oar. He is looking down fondly and admiringly upon her. Apparently he has told her that she may assist him in rowing the boat, and she in her desire to help feels as though she is doing a great share of the task. However, it is easy to see that it is really his strong, muscular arm which is actually propelling the boat through the waves. In this painting, called, "A Helping Hand," We see God's power helping us. Christ has granted to us the privilege of

sharing His work here below; however, we must never forget that we cannot perform our task through our abilities alone, but only as God's Spirit works in and through us. While He directs us to put our hand upon the oar, we must ever be aware of the source of our power. He is the strength of our life! There is no true spiritual progress without the anointing of the Holy Spirit to under gird our life and efforts. Let us recognize our own innate weakness and like the psalmist cry out: "O Lord; O my strength, please help me"! (Psalm 22:19). Then we shall not fail, for the inward man will be "renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

***1 John 2:27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.***

***Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.***

*What does it mean to you personally that Jesus lives in you by the Holy Spirit?*

*What difference should that make in your life? Does it?*

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

When food is put in a container to preserve it, it's important the container is properly sealed to keep the contents fresh and protect it from spoiling. God does that with us as well. He marks us as His own and preserves us for all eternity. This is called "sealing." In Bible times seals were also used to mark a letter or document as the property of the owner of the seal. God has, in effect, put His royal mark on us, guaranteeing our place in His family forever. *Ephesians 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you 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.*

Being sealed by God's Spirit is one of the hundreds of things that happen at the moment of salvation. Like being indwelt/baptized with the Spirit, it is a once-for-a-lifetime event. It doesn't need to be repeated, like being filled/controlled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

The word translated "sealed" is from the Greek "*sphragizo*" which refers to an official mark for security, authenticity, ownership, and authority. It's like a king's seal on a letter—permanent and protective. It means we are SECURE: we are protected forever; nothing can ever break the seal. It also shows AUTHENTICITY: it confirms our faith in Jesus as sufficient for salvation. Then, too, it shows OWNERSHIP, it marks us as God's inheritance. Finally, it assures AUTHORITY, it is a guarantee of our future inheritance in heaven.

In Bible times a seal was the way a person identified something that he owned. For example, business men would purchase timber in Lebanon. When they purchased it they stamped it with their seal. The logs were then floated down the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea to the port where the buyers could collect their logs. Any log with their mark of ownership on it belonged to them. The Christian is sealed with the Holy Spirit—he has God's mark of ownership, and God does not give up His own.

How do we know when we are sealed? We know because God promises it at the moment of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:22). It assures us that we are His, no matter our doubts or disobedience. It assures us God's Presence by His Holy Spirit so we can do (or not do)

whatever He desires. We never have to fear losing our salvation. Satan can put fear and doubts into our minds but remember you are sealed and nothing can break God's seal!

***Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Emphasize the permanence until final redemption.***

***2 Corinthians 1:21-22: "And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." Highlight the Spirit as a down payment.***

*How does the fact that you are sealed by the Spirit give you assurance you are His now and forevermore?*

*Thank God for the Holy Spirit's seal, ask for deeper awareness of His presence, and commit to living as His sealed people.*

## **D. AFTER SALVATION**

### **a. TRANSFORMATION**

#### **HOW CAN I BE SURE I AM BORN AGAIN?**

One of Satan's most successful tricks is to put doubts of salvation in our minds. That leads to fear and undermines our fellowship with the Lord. First let me say that salvation cannot be lost and, second, if a person doesn't have salvation they wouldn't care for it is only as the Spirit convicts us of sin that we turn to Jesus. The fact that you want to have salvation shows God's Spirit has worked in you and you are in His family. But there are other signs of salvation that can help give us assurance.

When a baby is born everyone immediately checks to make sure it is alive and healthy. There are certain signs that show life: movement, crying, pulse, etc. The same is true spiritually. There are certain spiritual 'signs' that show us that we have been born into God's family. I John lists 5 of these:

**1. BELIEF IN JESUS AS SAVIOR AND LORD** (1 John 5:1) A sign of spiritual life is a deep awareness that Jesus is God and Savior, that He is the One who provides salvation and it isn't anything we can do for ourselves or deserve.

**2. STRONG DESIRE TO OVERCOME SIN IN LIFE** (1 John 5:18) Along with new birth comes a different attitude to sin. We know it is wrong and have a strong desire to stop. While we may struggle with certain sins, there should be a slow but steady progress in godliness. Gradually we become more like Jesus in what we think and do.

**3. DOING WHAT GOD CONSIDERS RIGHT** (1 John 2:29) Learning how to live is a process, it takes growth. Growth is a sign of life. God says that those who are alive spiritually will grow spiritually. We are commanded to grow spiritually (2 Peter 3:18). Paul was sad the Corinthian believers weren't (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

**4. LOVE FOR OTHER BELIEVERS** (1 John 3:14) Anyone who does not love remains in death. There will be a natural bond between those who have live in God's family. We have the most important things in life in common. Usually there is instant rapport. We have a desire to spend time with and get to know other Christians. That is a joy and encouragement, for we are likeminded.

**5. VICTORY OVER WORLDLY WAYS** (1 John 5:4) While victory over sin often comes slowly and gradually, as Christians we know that we have within us a Power greater than that which is in the world and we can experience God giving us victory over things that used to defeat us.

**How can I be sure I am still a Christian?** When first born, babies are very susceptible to disease and illness, so they must be protected from these. They are very vulnerable. Until they grow and become stronger they are in danger of things that won't be nearly as hard to fight off later on. When someone is a new believer there is danger they will start to doubt their salvation or fear they have lost it. Thus, it is important to make sure young Christians are protected from the diseases of doubt and fear. Satan can't take away our salvation, so he tries to take away the joy of our salvation in these ways.

***John 10:27-30 . My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.***"

*Is doubting salvation a trick Satan uses on you? Rebuke it. If you aren't sure you have accepted God's gift of salvation do so now and write the date in your Bible so you can look at it when you get doubts in the future.*

### **TRANSFORMATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The story is told of a woodsman who came into town out of the woods for supplies. He was in need of several items, including a new ax. On the counter of the general store was advertised a new chain saw which was guaranteed to cut down twice as many trees in one day as any previous one. He eagerly purchased the saw. A week later he was back in the store. In rather descriptive terms he demanded his money back. When asked why, he said that before he was chopping down ten trees a day with his axe, but that now with much more effort he was lucky if he could fell one or two. The store owner looked the machine over very carefully. He checked the chain and the spark plug. He could find nothing wrong with it, so he flipped the switch and pulled the cord to start it. As it roared to life, the woodsman jumped back in surprise and exclaimed, "What's that noise?" We smile at the ignorance of the man in that story, but often we are no different than him. God has given us the Holy Spirit, yet we continue to live in sin and defeat.

In a recent sermon I heard Romans 7, where Paul shares his struggles with sin, described as a hall that leads to the great room of Romans 8 where he starts experiencing victory over the power of sin. That should be our progression as well. The problem is that many Christians live in the hall of Romans 7 and haven't entered into the victory of Romans 8. They use Paul's words of defeat in his battle with sin as a normal condition for Christians and accept it as their lot in life as well. But that's not what Paul was saying. He is not justifying our giving up in our struggle against sin. He is not saying since he lived in defeat for a time in his life that its normal for every Christian to remain there. Romans 7 describes our temporary experience of trying to live for Jesus but failing. But Romans 8 shows there can be victory (not perfection) instead of continual defeat. Paul makes it clear that it is God's Holy Spirit that is the power for victory, the key to the change in Romans 8.

The disciples Jesus chose were ordinary people. They struggled with their faith and obedience and often failed. Matthew was the only one with an education. None were scholars, none were Levites or priests, none were synagogue leaders. They were average working men, builders and fishermen. The only one with any real sophistication was Judas.

After the crucifixion they hid behind locked doors in fear. They had run away. Even Peter despite his boasting had denied he knew Jesus. But then in Acts we see a changed group of men. The holy Spirit came on them and they were transformed (Acts 2:1-4). They were filled with the Holy Spirit. they were changed forever.

**First, we see that their human frailties were transformed into supernatural gifts and abilities** (Acts 2:6-11). Immediately they had courage to go outside and share about Jesus with the very people they had feared just hours before. They were untrained country workmen but suddenly able to communicate in the native dialects from regions far removed from Palestine. Some even had the power to heal, showing that if God could heal physical bodies He could heal spiritually as well. They quickly gave the credit to God and not themselves (Acts 3:1-8). they were still the same frail human beings but God's Spirit working through them enabled them to do what they could not do in their own strength (Acts 3:11-12).

**Next, we see that confidence or replaced fear** (Acts 2:40). The religious leaders noted this change when they arrested them (Acts 4:13). They didn't look any different, but they were changed from the inside. What caused the transformation? They hadn't been trained in the power of positive thinking. Their environment didn't change, it was still as threatening as before. No one had given them a seminar on how to evangelize. God's Spirit had transformed them from the inside out.

Instead of running from the public, they ran toward the people to preach. Instead of trying to hide and not be seen, they boldly proclaimed Jesus. Even when threatened with arrest and death, they stood face to face with their accusers and proclaimed the Gospel (Acts 5:29). The religious leaders couldn't understand what had happened to them.

**Finally, joy and purpose be placed discouragement and anxiety.** Even when arrested, they clearly proclaim the truth that had transformed them (Acts 5:27-32). Instead of the competition and continual arguing between them, they were a united force for Jesus. Despite being threatened they kept on preaching (Acts 5:41-42).

Notice that God did not remove the threats and persecution. He did not keep them from being beaten and even killed. In fact, all but John were martyred and he was severely tortured and left on the island of Patmos in isolation. Peter, the one who was the quickest to run away in the past, writes in 1st Peter 4:12-13: *"Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."*

How did this sudden and complete change happen? What made the difference? The only explanation is the Holy Spirit that came from Jesus. He promised this in John 14:12, 16-18, 26. Acts 1:8 reaffirms it. God kept His word and the disciples were never the same.

What about you? Has God's Spirit transformed your life? What would you be like if God removed His Spirit and presence from your life? Would it make much difference? Do you live in fear and anxiety, hiding from the danger of being rejected for your faith? If so, you are living in Romans 7 and need to move into Romans 8 where there is victory through the Spirit of God Who dwells within you.

***John 14 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***

*What percent of your time is spent living in Romans 7, in sin in defeat?*

*Are you accepting that as the way you will live the rest of your life?*

*What do you need to do to move into Romans 8, where you live in victory through the Holy Spirit?*

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

When I fill my grandson's glass with milk to drink or his bowl with ice cream, he wants it filled as full as possible. He brings it empty and gives it to me, knowing he can't fill it himself but I can. That is how we need to come to God to be filled with His holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is essential to live the Christian Life. We talk about it and yet we often don't understand what it really means or how it works. Still, we are commanded to do it. ***“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18)*** Just what does that mean and how do we do it?

**FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT:** First, understand that there is a difference between the filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and the receiving of the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5 ). Every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. We do nothing, God gifts every believer with His Presence when we come to Him. It is a once-for-a-lifetime event. In contrast, being filled with the Spirit is a repeated experience and not all believers are filled with the Spirit. When we sin or willfully disobey, we can lose our filling, but not our salvation or the presence of the Spirit. When we grieve (don't do something He wants us to do, Ephesians 4:30) or quench (doing something He doesn't want us to do, 1 Thessalonians 5:19) Him, we do not allow His Presence to fill us. If “filling” is confusing to you, think of “controlling” and it might make more sense.

In order to be filled or controlled with the Spirit, we must be living in obedience to Him. The Spirit will not force his control on our lives; we must yield to Him and submit to His will. When that happens, He will work in and through us. Being filled is not something we have to ask for. It will automatically happen when we are yielded to God.

**The Glove and the Hand (Control):** It's like when I try to put my hand inside a glove. If there is nothing in the glove my hand will fill it, but if something is already in one of the fingers I can't fill the whole glove. The glove is a picture of you and me. We can't perform the tasks God wants us to do on our own, only when His Presence fills and uses us. And that only happens when the glove is open and not filled with something else. Then the hand controls the glove and it does what the hand wants. The Christian is the glove and the Holy Spirit is the hand, controlling and performing work through us.

**WALK BY THE SPIRIT:** Galatians 5:16 says we should *“walk by the Spirit so that we don't carry out the desires of the flesh.”* This is a present tense, meaning we must be continuously dependent on the Spirit. Walking is one foot being placed in front of the other in faith that the foot remaining on the ground will support the full weight of the body. Each foot in turn acts as support while the other foot is being moved forward. Walking can only be done effectively by successive acts of faith and the power of one's feet. To walk by the Spirit is a moment-by-moment attitude of dependence on God's power within us.

How do you know when you are under the Spirit's control? The main characteristic is that you are **becoming more like Jesus**. That means you think as He would have thought, you view everything through the grid of the Bible's worldview, you act and talk like He would have acted and talked. We might not do it perfectly all the time but we are moving in that direction and becoming more like Him than we were a while ago.

We have a picture of exactly what this should look like in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit. It is one fruit, not plural as if it were many different fruits. All the traits there go together to describe one person. Jesus was perfectly filled with the Holy Spirit and so when we are filled also we will become more like Him in our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Fruit only comes as God's Spirit works through us, as we abide in Him as described in

John 15. We cannot pretend to have godly love or joy or peace. Our flesh can give a good counterfeit for a short time, but it is nothing like the real thing.

I personally like the analogy of a hose. Water flows through the hose when there are no kinks or holes and when the hose allows itself to be used. When we allow God to fill us, His Spirit flows through us. It's His water of life that flows; the hose is vessel used. The water does the work of cleansing and refreshing, not the hose. The other analogy I like is of a surgeons' scalpel. After surgery the patient doesn't thank the knife he used, he thanks the man whose skill used it to perform the surgery. You and I are like the scalpel He uses. It is an honor and privilege to be used by Him, but we can't take the credit for what He accomplishes.

You may have admired a teacher or an athlete when younger and wanted to be just like them so you acted and dressed like they did. On the outside you pretended to be like them. Being Christlike is not like that at all. It starts on the inside as God's presence works in our lives and then the results are seen on the outside. You can't attach fruit to a vine and expect to grow. The fruit only grows when the nourishment comes from within the vine itself (John 15). That is what the Spirit does when filling us.

Another way to know we are filled by Him is when we have **a desire to serve God**. He puts a longing within us to live a life of service. We use our spiritual gifts. We help others, we speak to others about Jesus and we obediently take advantage of every opportunity God gives us to serve others. We put others and their needs first, just as Jesus does with us.

Finally, when we are filled with the Spirit it will be natural for us to **worship, praise and thank God** for everything He has done for us and is doing through us (Ephesians 5:18).

How can you know for sure if you are filled with the Spirit? The simplest answer is a single test, have you, to the best of your knowledge and ability, given the control of your life to Jesus? If the answer is "yes", then you know you're filled with his presence. But if you are convicted of an area that is not under his control, God's presence will not fill you.

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as like the wind (John 3:8). You don't see it, but you know when it fills the sails of a ship for it moves the ship in the direction it is heading. So, too, when we are filled with God's Spirit He will guide, direct and propel us in the direction He wants us to go.

***Acts 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.***

*Would God say you are letting the Spirit lead and guide your life, or are you doing what you want and trying to get God to make it happen?*

*What is the main hindrance in your life to allowing God's Presence to always control you?*

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR HELPER**

What a great privilege it was for the disciples to have Jesus with them to help with their needs! How lost they must have felt when He left, but then the Holy Spirit came to be their Helper, just as He is ours today. Having Jesus still living in Palestine would be great, but how much better is it that He now lives inside each one of us. He is always available, always with us. Yet often we don't understand the great resource we have. Let's look at what it means to say that the Spirit is our Helper.

Jesus' favorite name for the Holy Spirit, used more than any other, is "**Helper**" (also translated "Comforter," "Counselor"). When He came to earth as a human, Jesus voluntarily laid aside the use of His Godly attributes that would have made His life easier, so He could face what we face with the same

limits we have (Philippians 2:5-9). How was He then to function as God in knowing men's hearts, performing miracles and providing salvation for all? He did it through the power, the help of the Holy Spirit who is also available to help us with whatever we face.

The Spirit was the power force behind Virgin Birth (Luke 1:35). He brought Jesus to manhood (Luke 2:40,45) and came upon Him in a special way when He was Baptized so He could carry out His God-assigned work of redemption (Luke 3:21-22). He led Jesus into the wilderness and filled Him so He could face temptation by Satan (Luke 4:1). For three and a half years He was the power behind Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus' miracles were done by His power (Matthew 12:28).

The Spirit helped Jesus His whole life. The Bible says Jesus was led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), filled with the Spirit (Luke 4:1; John 3:34-35), anointed by the Spirit (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; Hebrews 1:9), empowered by the Spirit (Matthew 12:18) and rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21).

The Spirit also assisted in His atoning work on the cross (Hebrews 9:14). He was the power force that brought Jesus back to life (Romans 8:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:4; 8:11; 1 Peter 3:18). He guarantees our victory over death, too.

The Greek word used to describe the helping work of the Spirit is "parakaleo" and literally means "someone who is called alongside." Have you ever had your car refuse to start and needed a jump? Someone brought their functioning car alongside yours and fastened jumper cables. Then, with their power flowing into your weak battery, you were able to start your car. They came alongside you to help you in your time of need. That's just what God does by sending His Spirit to help us in our time of need – which is really all the time.

This word is translated "Helper," "Counselor," or "Comforter." *John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.* Jesus used this name for the Spirit 4 times in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:6-7). In Acts 9:31 He is called the "Encourager." It is the same word as is used for Jesus in 1 John 2:1 where He is called our "Advocate."

An "**advocate**" refers to an attorney for the defense. This is true of the Holy Spirit as well as Jesus (1 John 2:1). He takes our side before the Judge, pleading the sacrificial offering of Jesus' own blood for our sins (1 John 2:2). Suppose you were arrested for a crime. Guilty or innocent, you would want the help of someone who could speak to the judge for you, someone who could intercede on your behalf. You wouldn't want to face the judge alone. So, too, when Satan accuses us of sin, guilty or innocent, we want the help of Someone who can speak for us. We have that in Jesus (in heaven) and the Holy Spirit (in us). Jesus is our defense attorney when Satan points out our sin to God. He pleads His own blood as payment for that sin. The Spirit comforts us, encourages us and ministers forgiveness and restoration to us. Who could want a better Lawyer?

Greek soldiers always went into battle in pairs. When the enemy attacked, they would stand back-to-back, covering each other's blind side. One's battle partner was his "paraclete." Jesus does not send us to fight alone. The Spirit is our battle partner who covers our blind side and fights for us and with us. We don't sit around and do nothing, but what we do is done with His help and power.

***John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-***

***John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you***

***John 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.***

**John 16:6-7** *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

*What does it mean to you that the Spirit is always with you, fighting for you and helping you in all you do?*

*How often do you struggle on your own, thinking God doesn't care or isn't helping? Ask Him to forgive you for those times and thank Him for His ever-present help.*

## **THOSE WHO COMMIT THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN**

One of the most difficult counseling situations I had as a pastor was talking with someone who felt that God had deserted them and they no longer had the Holy Spirit living within them. This is a lie of Satan but can seem very real to the one believing it. Plus is it such an emotional issue that it's hard to get objective truth to the front of their minds. Feelings often overpower facts. This is an issue we need to consider so let's break down where the lies come from and look at the truth in God's Word.

**BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** *"Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."* (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:22-30; Luke 12:10). Understanding the context is always the key to rightly interpreting a passage, and that is true here. Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man which was clearly done by God's power. The religious leaders knew this but deliberately explained it away by saying it was Satan's power, not God's power, that did this. They couldn't deny what happened but gave the glory to Satan, not Jesus. They weren't confused or ignorant. They clearly stated: *"He casts out demons by Beelzebul (Satan)."* God's Spirit had shown them it was God's power through Jesus that performed this miracle, but they hardened their hearts to the Spirit's inner testimony and called God's truth evil, even when fully convinced it was true. They blasphemed the Spirit. It wasn't just a slip of the tongue, a bad thought, a season of doubt or a struggle with fear. It was a chosen heart posture, not a moment's slip.

Suppose you are the judge in a courtroom and a key witness presents undeniable, eyewitness truth about the case and you know inside he is right, but you want the case to go in a different direction so you declare the witness is evil and is lying and reject their testimony. You ban them from speaking and remove them from the court. Now suppose that witness was the Spirit inside you showing you Jesus was God but you reject the testimony of the only witness who can bring you truth? What are you left with?

If you are drowning and a lifeboat is sent to rescue you, what would you do? You know it's real and capable of saving you, but if you persistently and willfully reject it, you will die without rescue. That is what happens when someone rejects Jesus' offer of salvation. But suppose on top of that they say the one coming to save them is really coming to harm them and can't save them, calling the rescuer evil and demonic. On top of rejection they add blasphemy. That is what the religious rulers were doing.

Many scholars say blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be committed today because we do not have Jesus physically present doing undeniable miracles right in front of us which hold us totally accountable for the truth we see and which the Spirit is affirming within us. Perhaps not, but the principle is still true that giving Satan credit for God's works, despite the Spirit speaking truth to your heart, is blasphemy against the Spirit. When the Spirit knocks on the door of someone's heart and,

knowing who it is, they lock the door and nail it permanently shut, they are turning their back on God's salvation. He may, or may not knock again – but they refuse to ever answer.

This is not something a true believer could or would do, for we have already recognized Jesus as God and have the Spirit indwelling us. We may have doubts and questions, unbelief and rebellion at times, but no true believer could ever blaspheme the Spirit.

**THE UNFORGIVEABLE SIN** The blasphemy of the Spirit is the only unforgiveable sin, because rejecting Jesus as Savior is a free will choice made by those who use their free will to not ask for forgiveness. If someone rejects forgiveness God, who respects man's free will, won't force it on them. They will never want to be forgiven nor will they ask for it.

When someone tells me they think they have committed the unforgiveable sin I point out to them that the fact that they are concerned about this shows there is something spiritually alive inside of them. If they really committed it they wouldn't care about being forgiven. Rejecting Jesus as Savior is the only sin that isn't forgivable – not because God's can't forgive it if a person changes their mind, but because the person never does change and ask to be forgiven. This is a willful, persistent rejection of Jesus despite the Spirit showing them who Jesus really is.

If there were some sin God won't forgive He would have made very clear in Scripture what it is but there is no sin pointed out as unforgivable (except ongoing, unrepentant rejection of Jesus).

1 John 1:9 says *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"*. Psalm 103:3 *"He forgives all my sins."* There is no sin God cannot or will not forgive. He is so fair that if we confess known sin He automatically also forgives sins we aren't aware of because He knows our heart desire is to be sin free before Him and if we were aware of other sins we would confess them as well. So, if you think you have lost the Spirit, or your salvation, because of sin, rest assured that cannot happen.

Live skin is sensitive and feels pain when harmed, but dead skin is callous and has no feeling. If your heart is fearful of committing sin, remember that your spirit is alive by God's Spirit. If His Spirit were not there your heart would be hard and dead, insensitive to His promptings. People who commit this unforgiveable sin of rejecting Jesus don't care they have done so unless the Spirit again convicts them. So, the unforgivable sin is not a single act, it is an ongoing, deliberate rejection of the Spirit's witness about Jesus. Anyone worried about having committed this has not done so. (This topic will be continued in the next blog.)

*Has Satan used the lie that you have committed the unforgiveable sin against you?*

*If you struggle with accepting God's forgiveness, memorize some of the following verses:*

GOD FORGIVES:: Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 44:22-23; Matthew 9:6; 11:28-30; Mark 2:10-11; Luke 23:34, 43; John 8:36; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13-15; Hebrews 8:12; Psalm 32:5; 51 (all); 103:3; Isaiah 1:18; 55:6-7; 1 John 1:1-10; James 5:15, 16

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS FROM GOD: 1 John 1:6-9; Psalm 19:12; 32:1-5; 103; 139:23-24; Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; Romans 4:7-8; Hebrews 8:12; 1 John 2:12

GOD'S PROMISES OF FORGIVENESS: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 1:18; 55:6-7

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF BEING FORGIVEN: Luke 5:24-26; 7:47-50; Acts 5:30-31; 13:36-39

FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE TO ALL: Isaiah 53:5-6; Colossians 2:13; Romans 8:1-2; John 1:10-13; 6:47; 20:31; 1 John 1:7

RESULTS OF FORGIVENESS

SINS BLOTTED OUT: Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; 44:22; Acts 3:19; Colossians 2:14; Romans 8:1-2

SINS CAST BEHIND GOD'S BACK: Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34

SINS FORGOTTEN: Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34

SINS REMOVED AS EAST FROM WEST: Psalm 103:12

SINS DISAPPEAR, NOT FOUND: Jeremiah 50:20

SINS VANISH LIKE MORNING MIST: Isaiah 44:22; John 20:31

SINS CAST INTO DEPTHS OF SEA: Micah 7:19

## **WHAT IS THE SIN THAT LEADS TO DEATH?**

I loved to hike in the woods when I was young. I learned how to use a compass to find north so I could always orient myself and not get lost. The Holy Spirit is like a compass that always points to Christ, in believers as well as unbelievers who seek Him. There are many who don't want to hear anything good about Jesus and reject whatever they hear. That's like breaking the needle off a compass, or declaring that north is south and refusing all evidence to the contrary. Those who reject the clear leading of the Spirit will die in their sins without Jesus. When they stand before Him without Jesus, their rejection is not a sin that will be forgiven.

In the last blog we looked at the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:22-30; Luke 12:10*) can be misled to make it seem like we can lose the Spirit or our salvation. We saw that was rejecting proof of Jesus' deity and power clearly seen and affirmed in a person's heart by the Holy Spirit. Rejection of Jesus is the only unpardonable sin. There are other verses that some misinterpreted to seem to say we can turn from Christ. We'll look at them in this blog.

**THE SIN THAT LEADS TO DEATH** *1 John 5:16 "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that."* John is writing this to believers and about believers, so it's clearly not about rejection of salvation. It would have been very helpful if John would have named the sin he was referring to, but he didn't. Therefore, it probably isn't any one specific sin he is referring to but more a persistent, unrepentant attitude to any sin or sins. This may have happened to some believers who became apostates and spread false teachings.

It's important to note at the start that nothing is said about losing salvation. This refers to physical death, where God removes a believer in persistent sin who has resisted the Spirit's conviction to turn from sin (John 16:8). In His mercy, God may remove such a Christian so they don't continue to have a negative testimony for Jesus and to keep them from continuing in sin which will impact their present peace and future reward.

Paul warned the Corinthian believers of this, pointing out that some in the very carnal Corinthian church had been removed by death and others were in danger of removal ("sick") unless they repented. *1 Corinthians 11:30: "That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep"*. Please note that the context here is of partaking of the Lord's Supper with known sin in one's life. God's removal of King Saul, who had the Spirit (1 Samuel 16:14) but was removed because of continual, unrepentant sin in his life, is another example. This happened to Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5) whom the passages speaks of as part of the church and gives no hint that they were not believers.

We know God disciplines His children so they will grow. This is the same as any good parent does. *Hebrews 12:6-11 "because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to*

*the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* This true of David (Psalm 119:67, 71), Job (Job 5:17) and the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:19) as well. God still removes believers today who refuse to respond to His discipline and have a life of sin and shame ahead of them. It is really mercy, not punishment. Salvation isn't at stake, but the opportunity to live a life that brings glory to God is.

Think of a workman stranded on the top of the iron framework of a large building trying to get the attention of passersby below so they can send help to rescue him. He may start dropping small objects to get the attention of someone below, but if no one looks up he will use larger and larger bolts and pieces of metal until one is heavy enough to get the attention of the person it hits so they look up. That's how God 'drops' things into our lives that are to get our attention and get us to look up to Him so we repent and return to Him.

In 1 John 5:16, the Apostle John is writing to Christians about intercessory prayer. He encourages praying for fellow believers who sin in ways that aren't fatal to their spiritual life—God will restore them. But he mentions a "sin that leads to death" (sometimes called "sin unto death"), for which he doesn't urge prayer. John isn't forbidding prayer entirely; he's saying it's not guaranteed to be effective in such cases, as the person's heart may be beyond reach. God never forces a person against their free will choice. The focus in this passage is on praying confidently for redeemable sins while trusting God's judgment on the rest. (This topic continued in the next blog.)

***Proverbs 3:11-12 “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”***

*Has there been a time in your live when God allowed painful things to happen to get your attention and turn you to Him? Thank Him for it.*

*Could He be doing that now?*

*If that seems to be the case with someone you know pray for them, and reach out to them with a loving warning.*

## **CAN YOU LOSE THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

We have seen that blasphemy of the Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32) is attributing what He shows us about God's power to Satan and refuses to repent and believe. Without turning to Jesus there will be no forgiveness for his sin and no entry into heaven. This is only done by unbelievers, never believers. It is true that believers can continue in sin to such an extent that God, in His mercy, takes them to heaven prematurely (1 John 5:16). God disciplines His children to help them grow and mature, just as a parent does their children (Hebrews 12:6-11). There is one more passage to consider when we look at verses that can be misinterpreted to say we lose the Spirit and salvation. It can be confusing if we don't look at it carefully.

*Hebrews 6:4-6 states: "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."*

Again, we must read this In context. It is in a letter written to Jewish Christians facing persecution. They are being tempted to revert to Old Testament Judaism to escape persecution for Jesus. The book of Hebrews was likely composed around AD 60-70, before the temple's destruction.

The author urges maturity in faith, moving beyond basic teachings (Hebrews 6:1-3), and uses this warning to highlight the danger of rejecting Christ's superior sacrifice. The imagery in verses 7-8 compares fruitful land (blessed by God) to thorn-producing land (cursed and burned), illustrating the consequences of turning from the truth.

The passage described individuals who have experienced Christian fellowship and involvement—heard the Word, seen miracles, felt the Spirit's conviction—but never truly repented or been regenerated. Their "tasting" is superficial, like sampling without swallowing (contrast Jeremiah 15:16, where the Word is fully internalized). "Tasting" doesn't imply "eating". Turning from the faith reveals they were never saved. As John also said in 1 John 2:19: *"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us."* This fits the Jewish context: some joined the church but reverted under pressure, showing false faith. They did not lose their salvation because they never had it in the first place.

This is not the same as blasphemy against the Spirit, but it is committing the unforgivable sin of not committing to Jesus as Savior. Blasphemy against the Spirit is attributing God's miracles to evil, while this is more about abandoning faith after enlightenment. The common thread? These aren't about accidental sins but willful, persistent life-styles of rebellion.

This passage isn't meant to terrify sincere believers but to motivate faithfulness. If you're concerned about having "fallen away," that's evidence the Spirit is still convicting you—true apostates wouldn't worry (they'd be indifferent or hostile). God remembers your work and love, promising an unshakable inheritance for those who persevere (Hebrews 6:9-12). Pray for a soft heart, study the Word, and surround yourself with a godly community to guard against drifting.

If you have put your faith in Jesus for salvation you have nothing to fear. Don't think you may not have "done it right" – there's nothing to do but make a mental decision to trust in Jesus for salvation. God knows your heart and that is all it takes. You can do nothing to lose your salvation.

But because our salvation is secure is no reason to take advantage of it. A husband or wife who knows their mate will stand by them no matter what they do does not use that assurance to hurt their mate. Nor does a parent whose child is devoted to them use that as an excuse to abuse them. Neither should God's children, the Bride of Christ, use His unconditional love as an excuse to sin against Him. Rather it should motivate us to deeper love, to praise Him and to be even more fully committed to serving Him.

***Hebrews 6:9-12 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.***

*Are you open to the Spirit's guidance and work in your life?*

*If there is any unconfessed sin in your life, ask God to forgive you and turn from the sin.*

*Ask God to keep your heart soft and sensitive to the work of the Spirit within you.*

## **DO YOU PRAY IN THE SPIRIT? YOU SHOULD!**

I remember growing up in a church with a prescribed ritual to go through every Sunday. My mother seemed to mean every word she said, but I often found myself just parroting words without

paying attention to what I was saying. When I became a Christian I wanted to really communicate with God, but still I often repeated words without thinking about them. I'm sure that happens to all of us. When is the last time you prayed for your food and a minute later wonder if you prayed or not?

I think the disciples faced that as well for they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). From that request we got the Lord's Prayer – an example of what should go into our prayer. Yet many times that prayer is repeated word for word with little thought being put into what is said. So, what is the 'right' way to pray? What's the key to getting through to God and getting quick answers? To begin, we must have a correct understanding of what prayer is.

Sometimes we see prayer as a magic formula. Get it right and the door unlocks to wonderful treasures. We think the trick is using the right words or being in the best position to get His attention, or have done enough good things for Him so we can cash in our points for what we want from Him. After all, He does promise to answer our prayers, doesn't He? *"And if we know that He hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of Him"* (1 John 5:15). James says our prayers are *"powerful and effective"* (James 5:16). So, if ours don't seem to be answered the problem must be with me and how I pray, right? Well, yes and no.

What He hears is the posture and words of our heart more so than the position of our body or fine sounding words we recite. The "proper" way to pray is to speak person to Person, from our heart to His, out loud or in our thoughts. Prayer isn't about us trying to get God to do what we want, but making ourselves willing to do what He wants. Prayer is praise and worship, listening and mediating and bringing our needs as well as the needs of others to Him for Him and allowing Him to determine how He will meet those needs. After all, we aren't telling Him anything He doesn't already know, are we? And if He already knows it, why does He want us to pray? It's certainly not to inform Him of things He may not be aware of or remind Him of things He may have forgotten! Nor does He need our advice about how to take care of a situation. Prayer is inviting Him into our very being and sharing our deepest thoughts and feelings, needs and desires with Him. Is that so hard to do? Evidently it is.

The key to prayer is not finding some tricky way to get through, but to submit our will to His as Jesus did in Gethsemane. He expressed His needs and desires but overrode all of it with: *"Yet not as I will, but as You will"* (Matthew 26:39). Jesus understands when we struggle with prayer, He was tempted with the same distractions and interruptions.

An important clue about how to pray comes in the phrase **"pray in the Spirit"** which is repeated 3 times in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20; Romans 8:26-27). God's Spirit lives in all believers (John 14:17). The Spirit is present to help us in prayer (John 14:15-21; 15:26; 16:7) and teach us how to pray, even when we can't find the right words (Romans 8:26-27). Jesus calls the Spirit our "helper," "comforter," and "encourager." The Greek word 'parakletos' literally means "to come along side" and refers to someone who is called to the aid of another. To "pray in the Spirit" means to allow God's Presence through the Holy Spirit lead and direct us as we pray. He will give us the thoughts to have, the words to use and when there are no right words will take our emotions and heart cravings directly to God as our prayer (Romans 8:26-27).

Perhaps we can best understand what it means to "pray in the Spirit" by understanding what it is not. It is not ritual words to gain God's attention, manipulative acts to cause God to respond positively, doing our best in our own strength, whipping up lots of emotion or impressing God with our good works to earn something from Him. Instead, we are to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, surrendered to Him so He can speak God's truth to us. It's recognizing our need of Him in all things and not wanting to say anything in prayer that isn't directed by Him.

Many times, praying in the Spirit means not saying anything, just listening and letting His Spirit minister to us while we meditate on God and His love for us. Good communicators are first of all

good listeners, and that applies to our communication with God as well. After all, we don't have anything so say to God that He doesn't already know but He has many important truths to pass on to us if we would just listen and not interrupt Him! I don't like being interrupted when I'm talking, neither do you. And neither does God.

When you pray in the Spirit your mind doesn't wander and you don't want it to end. The focus isn't on you and your issues; it's on God and His greatness. Have you ever found yourself with a worship song in your heart – not just in your head, but in your heart – that you simply repeat over and over? Me too. That's prayer from the Spirit Who shows us God's greatness and leads us to worship.

*“So, what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding also; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding also.” (1 Corinthians 14:15).*

***“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people” (Ephesians 6:18).***

***“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (Jude 1:20-21).***

***“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Romans 8:26).***

*How much of your prayer life is in the Spirit compared to how much is in the flesh?*

*Sit quietly and listen to God's Spirit as He speaks God's truth to you. Enjoy His presence. That's also praying in the Spirit.*

## **ARE YOU WALKING IN THE SPIRIT?**

How old does a baby need to be to start to walk? 12 months? 15 months? What if they are 5 years old and still crawling? Walking is natural, something healthy babies want to do. Learning to walk takes time and effort. It doesn't come quickly and easily but takes perseverance. Babies learn to walk one step at a time. Balance, timing and strength come slowly. They often fall down and have to get up and try again.

God says the same is true of a child of His learning to walk spiritually. He says we are to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). Step by step we must learn how to move through our life each day in a godly manner. We need to live our daily lives in a way that is honoring and pleasing to Him. We get our balance, our timing and our strength from the Holy Spirit, not from ourselves. If we could live the Christian life merely by doing our best, there would have been no reason for God to send His Spirit. He knows we need His help and that the only way we can walk as He wants is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**HOW TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT** Paul writes about the importance of walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). That means we are to let God's Spirit guide and direct us in all we think and do. How can we do that? The Bible commands believers to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Being ‘filled’ with the Holy Spirit is not a matter of trying to get more of the Holy Spirit in us. It's a matter of us give more of ourselves to God and His Spirit. When you accept Jesus as Savior the Holy Spirit indwells you and stays as long as you are on this earth. That is like putting your fist in a glove. The glove is indwelt with your hand, but it isn't filled with your hand. Each finger must totally fill each finger of the glove before the glove is ‘filled’ with the hand. That's the way it is with us and God's Spirit. For the glove to perform the function it is made to do, it needs to be totally filled with the hand. In order for the children of God to live the way God wants us to live means we have to be

totally filled by His Spirit. We must give Him full access to every part of our lives, holding nothing back from His control.

Salvation is a faith decision to accept God's free gift of salvation. The person who has done this is a Christian and has assurance of eternal life. Then another decision must be made. That concerns who the person will live life for: Jesus or self. This second decision is a commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus, becoming more like Him in all we do (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:25-33). This commitment often needs to be remade to keep Jesus first in life. Salvation is free and easy. It costs us nothing for Jesus paid the price for us. We just receive it. But becoming a disciple is costly, for it means making a commitment to live for Jesus and not ourselves. It is costly for we must sacrifice our own sinful desires to live a life of obedience to God. This can only be done as we allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control us. We must be sensitive to His leading and direction. This is the only way to live the Christian life. Salvation is by faith in Jesus, living the Christian life is also by faith in Him.

The Bible also warns us to make sure we don't 'grieve' the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). This means we aren't to do anything that will make the Spirit sad. Sin, disobedience or being too busy to spend time with God will do this. When it happens, the Spirit doesn't leave us, but that sin does keep us from being totally controlled by Him. Thus, we don't enjoy His presence, power and protection as we otherwise would.

The other danger we are warned to watch out for is 'quenching' the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Quenching God's Spirit is like taking a hose or straw and bending it, so a kink prevents free flow of fluids through it. Sin or any kind of disobedience in our lives will prevent God's Spirit from totally filling and flowing through us as He desires and we need.

Jesus talks about this same principle in John 15:1-8. He tells His disciples that they must 'abide' in Him. That means they must stay connected to Him, depend on Him, and remain close to Him. That is the only way fruit can be produced. A branch not connected to the vine, no matter how close otherwise, will not produce fruit. Paul also uses the analogy of crucifixion to picture the same truth (Galatians 2:20).

Dwight L. Moody once demonstrated the principle like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the glass I have in my hand?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." But the evangelist replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it." Finally, after many suggestions, moody picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for the child of God does not come by working hard to eliminate sinful habits, but rather by allowing the Holy Spirit to take full possession.

To live the Spirit-filled life you must be absolutely and thoroughly convinced you can do nothing apart from the indwelling strength of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-controlled life begins with an overwhelming realization that we are absolutely helpless and hopeless apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

If a Christian doesn't live a holy life and doesn't walk by the Holy Spirit, he or she is still a Christian. They do not lose their salvation. Their fellowship with God is broken by the sin but they are still a Christian and are in God's family. Instead of a spiritual person the Bible says they are carnal, they are letting the desires of their flesh control them and not God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). The cure for getting back into fellowship with God is confession (1 John 1:9) and repentance of sin and asking God to fill them with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

***Galatians 5:16, 25 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.***

*Think of some examples of when you are walking by the Spirit. What are some of the benefits?*

*Ask God to show you anywhere in your life you aren't walking by the Spirit.*

## **HOW TO KNOW IF YOU ARE GROWING SPIRITUALLY**

The Bible equates physical growth and spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2). We will follow the same analogy here. It is the Holy Spirit that brings growth to us as we follow Him. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, revealing and inspiring the writers (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16). In the Old Testament He came upon and filled believers at times of special need in their lives and ministry. It is in His power that Jesus ministered and did miracles, for Jesus voluntarily laid aside His divine attributes when He came to earth (Philippians 2:7).

Today He is the One Who restrains sin in general (2 Thessalonians 2:7), convicts unbelievers of sin (John 16:8-9), and seals (guarantee of assurance) believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He indwells every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), produces fruit (good works) in believers (Galatians 5:22-23) and baptizes (identifies) all Christians into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He guides and directs believers as well as teaching and reminding them of God's Word (John 14:26). He gives spiritual gifts to each believer and through them ministers to the whole Body (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

We are commanded to be filled (controlled) by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) by continually being in total submission to God (Galatians 5:16,25) and not allowing any sin or disobedience in our lives (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). We will look at the signs of life so we have assurance of salvation.

To evaluate spiritual growth, we can measure our improvement in the "fruit of the Spirit." The Spirit desires to produce these qualities in us: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). When we, or those we are working with, grow in these traits then we know spiritual growth is taking place for these best describe Jesus.

When my children were young we measured their growth every 6 months. We had a chart we would put against the wall and draw a line showing their height. We could see how much they had grown since the last time. We don't have that kind of measuring stick to tell if we or our people are growing spiritually, but we do have some standards in God's Word that can help us measure growth. I want to give you 10 of them. See how you are doing compared to them and see how your church is doing as well. (Taken from "What God Expects of Pastors" by Jerry Schroyer)

1. Do you think about and want to go to heaven more than you used to? (Philippians 1:21-24; Titus 2:11-13)
2. Are you becoming more loving in how you treat others? (Matthew 22:36-40; 1 John 4:20-21)
3. Are you more aware of God's work in your life? (Philippians 3:10; Galatians 2:20)
4. Does God's Word have a greater place in your life than it used to? (1 Peter 2:2-3; Psalms 119:9-11; Hebrews 4:12)
5. Is your worship more God-centered and frequent than it used to be? (Job 1:20-21; Psalm 100)
6. Are you more sensitive to sin than you used to be? (Romans 12:1-2; 7:14-19)
7. Are you quicker to forgive others who hurt you? (Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13)
8. Are you becoming more aware of how great and powerful God is? (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 64:8; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:13)
9. Is your prayer life becoming stronger and more personal? (James 5:16; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Matthew 7:7-8)

10. Do you find yourself better able to recognize His voice when He speaks to you? (John 14:26; 10:4, 16, 27; Acts 9:11-15)

Remember, it is God who brings about growth in us as we allow His Spirit to work (John 15:1-8) and produce His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-26). Just as a parent oversees the maturing of his child, so our heavenly Father oversees our growth. His promise is that He will work in us as long as we are on this earth so that we continue to grow more and more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). What a blessing and what a privilege that is. God expects us to grow, but He doesn't expect us to do it on our own. He will bring that about as we follow Him.

**1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,**

*Where have you grown most in the last few years?*

*Where is God growing you at the present?*

*Where is growth most needed in your faith?*

## **b. LISTENING TO GOD**

### **GOD SPEAKS TO US TODAY**

Have you ever had anyone open a conversation with you by saying, "God told me to tell you ..." Whenever I heard that I immediately became skeptical. I guess I was a bit jealous because it didn't seem God ever told me anything. So, I make an in-depth study about how God speaks to us, because I really wanted Him to speak to me as well. I've always desired deeper intimacy with God, so hearing Him talk to me was very important. As it turns out He had been speaking to me a lot more than I realized. The problem was that I usually didn't recognize His voice. That may be the case with you as well. If so, the purpose of these blogs is to help you recognize and understand God's voice for He really does speak to us today.

There is a real need for Christians today to learn how to listen to God. I read one author who said that 90% of Christians are more concerned about so-called "church-work" than about praying, and of the 10% left, 9% of those are much more willing to talk to God than listen to Him. In our relationships with others, we are often more interested in talking and listening, and unfortunately we are often that way with God, too.

Which is more important: what you have to say to God or what God has to say to you? Which do you focus on more, talking to God or listening to God? We know He already knows what we are going to say before we say it, but we don't know what He wants to say to us unless we listen to Him.

I'm convinced He wants to speak to us. He does speak to us often. He wants us to listen to Him. Psalms 81:13 "If my people would but listen to me..." Jeremiah 33:3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' Psalm 50:3 Our God comes and will not be silent; 1 Samuel 3:1-10 God spoke to Samuel as a boy (told he will replace Eli.

God wants to fellowship with us, to communicate with us. He created us to have a personal relationship with Him. Not only does God desire to communicate with man, but man desires to communicate with God. Psalm 83:1 O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still.

We know communication from God is possible for He is God. If He can hear us speak to Him, He can certainly speak to us as well. Not only is it possible, it is probable for He made us to relate to Him. Even more, it is necessary for it is the only way man can know God.

So, man desires to speak to God just as God desires to speak to man. The Bible is full of examples of this in the past. When we see how common it was in Bible times we'll realize it can be just as common today.

In the Old Testament God walked and talked with Adam in Eden, He spoke to Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Job. He spoke to Moses at the burning bush, in Egypt, in the desert and at Mt Sinai. We read that God spoke from the cloud as well as the Ark. He even spoke through a donkey to Balaam. It is recorded that God spoke to Samuel, David, Nathan, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Jonah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah and other prophets. Kings like Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehu heard from Him as well.

God spoke often to Jesus. He spoke to the leaders of the early church. Philip was told to go to the eunuch, Paul heard Him on the road to Damascus, Peter was told to go to Cornelius, Ananias to Paul and Paul to Macedonia. These and many other examples are listed on your handout if you want to look up any of them.

Thus, we see that God did indeed speak in the past, often and to many different people. Therefore, it is only natural He would do the same thing today. Charles Stanley says, "God not only speaks in general and absolute terms to all people, but He speaks to each one of us personally. We can hardly comprehend that possibility with our finite minds. God is an infinite God, and He is capable of communicating with each one of us, right where we are – in the midst of our current circumstances of crises – in very personal, direct and explicit terms." (Jul 14, 2025 Doylestown, PA)

***Jeremiah 33:3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'***

*How important is it to you to listen to God?*

*How much time do you spend listening to Him each day?*

*Spend some time now sitting quietly listening to His Spirit speak to your heart.*

## **GOD SPEAKS IN A GENTLE WHISPER**

There is an old story about two men walking down a busy, loud New York City street. Horns honked, engines roared, PA systems blasted advertisements. All of a sudden one of the men, who had been an outdoorsman all his life, stopped and said, "What's that?" The other man couldn't imagine what he was talking about with all the noise and confusion all around. The first man went over to the side of a building and picked up a cricket he had heard. The friend was amazed that the outdoorsman had even heard it, but his ears were attuned to that sound and could pick it out of the din around them. That's how our spiritual hearing needs to be. We need to be able to pick God's voice out of all the other voices clamoring for our attention. Hopefully this blog will help you to be able to do that.

First we'll look at what God's voice sounds like, and then we'll talk about some of the things He says. The first clue we have to what God's voice sounds like is in I Kings 19 where we see it is a still, small voice – a gentle whisper.

*Kings 19:11-13 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled*

*his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

In the still, small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of His personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize.

There is a speaker system at the Ontario Motor Speedway in California that has an output of 30,800 watts connected to 355 speakers and able to communicate to 230,000 people above the noise of the car races. God could outdo that, but instead chooses to speak quietly. Therefore, if we want to hear Him we can't wait for Him to shout over the noise in our life but we need to learn to be quiet and listen for His still, quiet voice.

I remember several years ago I was marrying a couple that I had known for a long time and had been coming to church and Bible studies for quite some time. They had some major 'issues' it seemed that had worked through, but the day before the wedding the groom did something that was part of his old pattern. I clearly heard God's voice in my spirit telling me not to marry them, so I didn't. The bride and both families really put a lot of pressure on me to go ahead with the wedding but I knew that God had spoken.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes: "God sometimes answers directly in our spirit. The prophet said, 'I will watch and see what He will say in me.' God speaks to me by speaking in me. He can so lie something upon the mind that we are certain of the answer. He can impress something upon our spirits in an unmistakable manner. We find ourselves unable to get away from an impression that is on our mind or heart; we try to rid ourselves of it, but back it comes."

Remember, this is not a verbal voice, a sensation or an emotional experience. In fact, it can be very easy to overlook His voice or just think it's a thought of our own.

Try an experiment: Be as still and silent as you possibly can for the next 30 seconds or so. Listen as intently as you can, noticing the sounds you hear. How many sounds? What are they?-- Close your eyes and begin to listen. Pause: Did you hear 1 sound-- 2? 3? 4? 5? Did you hear the ticking of the clock? Heater noise? Birds? Traffic? Voices? Your own breath? Your heartbeat? Ringing in your ears?

We are seldom still enough to hear the subtle sounds. Most of us suffer from a steady dose of noise pollution: TV, radio, conversation. Constant sound bombards us until the naturalness of silence sounds foreign, unnatural, threatening, and we'll do just about anything to cover it up. In a significant way, we are in fact addicted to noise. The constant blaring of the TV is for many an electronic companion whose presence we take for granted; Muzak fills the elevator; we jump in the car and switch on the radio to fill the uncomfortable void; even a lapse in social conversation is viewed with alarm, and someone has to rescue the moment by talking. Even in church, if a few moments of silence are called for in worship, most church members have this internal response: "When will this be over?"

We need to learn to hear God's still voice as He speaks to us. I can think back on times He told me to talk to someone about Him and I didn't. Those still haunt me. Better memories are the times when God put it on my heart to speak to someone and I obeyed.

I hope you've been learning to listen to Him this past week. Have you taken time to let Him speak and to sit and listen? Have you become more aware of when and how He speaks to you? I hope so. (Jul 21, 2025 Doylestown, PA)

*When are sometimes you heard God speaking to you?*

*How did you know it was God?*

*Sit quietly and listen for His vice now.*

## **GOD SPEAKS RICH & ENLIGHTENING THOUGHTS**

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was become unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.' I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

That's good advice for all of us. Listen slowly; listen intently, for His voice is often a gentle whisper, a still, small voice. When we learn to listen for it we recognize that He speaks rich and enlightened thoughts to our spirits.

God can put a new idea directly and immediately into our mind. He can give us a new perspective in which to view something. He can put new desires into our hearts. He can stimulate certain memories stored within our mind just when they are most needed.

Martin Luther wrote: "If the Holy Spirit should come when these thoughts are in your mind and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts, then give Him the honor, let your preconceived ideas go, be quiet and listen to Him Who can talk better than you; and note what He proclaims and write it down."

James Dobson has given some of the best practical advice I have ever heard on how someone who really wants the will of God and who has a basically correct understanding of it should proceed. Describing how he does it himself, he says, "I get down on my knees and say, 'Lord, I need to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books, magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances.'"

Often God's still, small voice takes the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though they are not from us.

When God speaks in your heart it doesn't matter where your mind has been going; He blocks and overrides all circuits. You are captivated by His voice speaking to you. He commands your undivided attention. There is absolute certainty in what He says. What He says is right. His word has perfect balance and proportion. Everything He shows us fits together seamlessly. The word He gives us is complete. Everything He says compliments everything He's been showing us.

It's true that Satan can counterfeit this, but that just proves that God does speak to us in this way. A little later we'll have a whole message on how to tell God's voice from Satan's counterfeit leading.

When I study, when I prepare sermons and lessons, I try to be very aware of the rich and enlightening thoughts that God sends me by means of His Spirit. When I counsel I always try to be sensitive to His leading and direction. When we are involved in spiritual warfare it is essential to be in tune to hear what thoughts God gives me. God speaks to you in the same way. You need to learn to take time to recognize His voice. (Jul 28, 2025 Doylestown, PA)

**John 2:22** *After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*

**John 14:26** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

*Spend time quietly listening to God. Have a paper and pencil with you to start writing down some of the things that come to mind. It may be a reminder of something to do or an idea about how to solve a problem. It could be just a sense of peace and wellbeing. But first you must listen.*

## **GOD SPEAKS THROUGH A BURNING HEART**

In the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral there is what is known as the "Whispering Gallery." Through the peculiar construction of the dome a whisper by a person at one side travels round and can be distinctly heard by another person standing at the other.

An even more remarkable whispering gallery is that known as the "Ear of Dionysius" at Syracuse in Sicily. This is a vast cave, which externally bears a resemblance to a human ear. Entering by a low doorway, the visitor finds himself in a huge cavern. High up, concealed in the roof, is a chamber, which can only be entered by a concealed path at the top. The faintest whisper uttered below is distinctly heard by those concealed above. In this chamber the tyrant Dionysius used to sit listening to his slaves working or to his captives imprisoned below. All their plots against him were thus, to them, mysteriously discovered and circumvented. From this historical fact the cave has received the name of the "Ear of Dionysius."

We, too, can learn to hear everything God says – if we know how to listen. God really does speak to us today. He desires communication with us and we desire communication with Him. Hearing from God is probable, possible and even very necessary. How does God speak and what does He say?

God speaks to us today through His Holy Spirit. We can hear His voice. It's not a sound, it's a voice. It's not something you hear with your ears but in your mind. Once you learn to recognize and respond to this voice you'll recognize it often. It's a gentle whisper, not a shout. God speaks rich and enlightening thoughts to our spirit by His Spirit. Often this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a burning within my heart.

The disciples who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Resurrection Sunday experienced this. Luke 24:32 says, "They asked each other, 'were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

Psalms 39:1-3 talks about this as well. "My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned."

One of the more familiar quotes about this comes from the journal of John Wesley for May 14, 1738. "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Haven't you found yourself moved by something you sense in your spirit? Perhaps it happens during a song or sermon, when listening to a testimony or out in nature? This stirring is God speaking to our hearts through His Holy Spirit, putting His fire within us to highlight something of importance.

Charles Stanley writes: "As you pray and read, trust the Holy Spirit to quicken your spirit to His truth. You may feel this as warmth inside, or you may feel a great sense of absoluteness about a particular verse. Sometimes the words on the page of your Bible may seem to stand out to you as if they were written in bold headlines. Sometimes you may not be able to get away from a particular passage. It comes repeatedly to your mind, and you can't seem to shake it from memory."

So, we see that this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a burning within our hearts. How He speaks is by a gentle, quiet whisper. Where He speaks is to our thoughts and to our hearts. He touches our rational mental capacity (enlightened thoughts) as well as our emotional feelings (burning hearts). (Aug 4, 2025 Doylestown, PA)

***Luke 24:32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"***

***Ps 39:1-3 I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." 2 But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. 3 My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:***

*Ask God to make you sensitive to the 'burning' He puts in your heart; the desires and emotions He creates in you to speak His truth to you.*

## **c. HOLY SPIRIT & SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

We know how important the Holy Spirit is in our Christian life, but we sometimes forget the crucial role He has in our spiritual warfare. For one thing, He wages war against our sinful nature so we can have victory over sin and live a holy life (Galatians 5:17). Isn't it great we don't have to fight sin alone? We are in a battle with our sinful nature, as Paul describes in Romans 7:15-25. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to help us have victory over temptation and sin.

Don't be surprised or discouraged because you have to battle so much and so often. We WILL have battles as long as we live in this body. We'll never be so 'spiritual' we won't struggle. That will only happen in heaven.

The Spirit also is active in teaching us the truth of God's Word (Ephesians 6:14) and warning us against false teachings. He will sound an alarm in your spirit when something or someone doesn't seem 'right.' Learn to recognize and trust that prodding for it is God's Spirit warning you. He will warn of sin as well.

He will help you remember what you have studied in the Bible when you need it (John 14:26). First you need to spend time studying and learning the Bible. Memorize verses that stand out in your mind so you can use them when attacked or when speaking to others. That's how Jesus resisted Satan (Matthew 4).

We aren't to pray to or worship the Spirit, but we must always be aware of Him, for He is God Himself living inside of us to help us in any way we let Him. Turn to Him, allow Him to give you the wisdom, insight, courage and perseverance you need. Don't fight alone! What could be better than having God live inside you!

## **NEW SOLDIERS EQUIPPED FOR BATTLE**

The book of Acts opens with **Jesus returning to heaven** after His victory over sin and Satan while on earth (Acts 1:1-11). Then after choosing Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:12-26) the believers waited for Jesus' promised gift, the Holy Spirit. When He came they had God's power and immediately seen in Peter's change from a coward who denied Jesus (Mark 14:66-72) to courageous spokesman (Acts 2:14-40). Three thousand responded by putting their faith in Jesus (Acts 2:41).

*LESSON FOR TODAY: God's Spirit is essential for us to have victory in our battle against sin and Satan. Without His wisdom, guidance, power, peace and protection we wouldn't be able to stand against all that comes against us. It is essential to learn to listen to Him, be sensitive to His guidance, follow His leading and know how to tap into His power.*

Satan had failed to stop Jesus from sealing his doom by His crucifixion and resurrection. Satan was not able to stop Jesus from defeating him at the cross and the empty tomb. But if he could keep the gospel message from spreading, he could still rule the vast majority of humanity. His goal at this point became to limit the power of the brand new Christian church, intending to keep it weak, keep it from growing. So he put all his energy into defeating the early Christians, hoping to extinguish the spark before it grew and spread, and keep mankind in darkness and bondage. However, as we follow the growth of the early church, we will see how his attempts worked against him!

His first approach was to bring **physical opposition**. The early Christians experienced rejection, suffering, persecution, and imprisonment (Acts 4:1-4). However, this opposition actually worked against Satan! The disciples responded to their trials with increased faithfulness and commitment (Acts 4:5-22). God used even the efforts of the enemy to make them stronger as they trusted in Him and saw His provision (Romans 8:28).

*LESSON FOR TODAY: While Satan still attacks the church today, God often uses persecution to make the church stronger and increases their witness. He uses Satan's attacks for His purpose. All things may not be good in themselves, but God does use them for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). It has been said that the church can stand anything but success. Where the church has not faced opposition but has been popularly accepted, there has often been a compromising that leads to weakness among God's people. While we never like to experience pain of any kind, God still uses it for His glory and our growth. This is a key way that we can defeat Satan's efforts in our lives. We must respond to trials with increased faithfulness and commitment, as the early disciples did. In that way, we can actually turn Satan's efforts against himself and take ground for God's kingdom.*

## **d. SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

### **SPIRITUAL GIFTS – AN INTRODUCTION**

Years ago, I saw a picture of two lepers working together to plant seeds so they would have food to eat. One had no hands and no feet but he could see, so the other leper, who was blind but could use his hands and legs, rode on his back. One would give directions and the other plant the seeds. That's how God wants us to use the spiritual gifts He has given us. They are for us to use together for the benefit of all. Unfortunately, the topic of spiritual gifts is often more divisive than unifying in today's church. Like the church in Corinth, we are often ignorant about their purpose and use (1 Corinthians 12:1). That's why Paul devoted 3 chapters (12-14) to correcting their misunderstandings about this important topic.

First of all, **what is a spiritual gift?** It is an ability we receive through the indwelling Holy Spirit to minister to others in the Body of Christ or share the Gospel with unbelievers. No believer has all the gifts so we need each other to be full and complete. It's like we each receive a piece of a machine when we come to Jesus for salvation. When we work with other believers our various parts fit and function together for the benefit of all.

**Are spiritual gifts the same as talents?** No. God may use a talent as part of a spiritual gift, like using musical skill as part of a worship leader's gift or a talent with math for a church accountant's spiritual gift of administration or organization, but they are not the same. Everyone is born with talents; spiritual gifts are from God's grace to enable believers to function in ways they wouldn't be able to on their own. They function through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Is my gift something I can use for myself?** No, it is to benefit others. My gift is teaching but I can't go in a room alone and teach myself. My wife is gifted in evangelism and hospitality, but she can't use either of those gifts by herself. Spiritual gifts are given to ministers to others, not the person who has the gift. We can enjoy and benefit from the gift, but their focus is for others. *1 Corinthians 12:7 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*

Paul equates these gifts to the human body where various parts have different roles but all are needed to complete a total body that functions as it should (1 Corinthians 12:14-20). Hands are very key to the body, but a body of just hands without arms, legs, ears, etc., wouldn't be able to function. Or think of the great Sequoia trees in the American west. They grow hundreds of feet high, but they don't grow alone. They are seen in groups, not standing by themselves. Their roots are very shallow and small, but they entwine with the roots of other trees around them and form a tight network that holds all of them upright and strong. That's why God puts us in the church to stand, and it's why Christians who neglect involvement with the Body of Christ weaken and fade.

Paul explains it this way. *1 Corinthians 12:14-20 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. Suppose your left hand refused to operate because it wasn't a right hand, or the parts of your body were jealous of each other and competed with each other instead of working to support each other?*

Gifts are like tools in your tool belt. Some are similar but all have a different function. All are needed to complete a project. A saw is needed to cut wood, but it is no good when a nail needs to be driven into wood. Each has its part. So, it is with the gifts. (There will be more about spiritual gifts in future blogs.)

***1 Corinthians 12:4–6 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.***

*Why do you think there is so much confusion and disunity over the spiritual gifts today?*

*How aware are you of the spiritual gifts God has given you?*

## LISTING THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

**What are the various gifts?** There are three main lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. They are not the same, although there are many similar gifts mentioned. That's because there is no cut and dry laundry list of gifts. Other gifts are mentioned other places that aren't part of these lists. While not an exhaustive list, these are the main ones:

**SHEPHERDING GIFTS:** PASTOR: someone who is responsible for the spiritual welfare of a person or people, similar to the way a shepherd cares for sheep. LEADERSHIP: the ability to know where God is leading and to bring other with you as you follow Him. ADMINISTRATION: have a clear grasp of something that needs doing and the ability to set goals and make plans to accomplish these goals.

**THE SENDING GIFTS:** MISSIONARY: a God-given ability to use their other spiritual gifts in a different culture than the one they grew up in. EVANGELISM: the ability to share the Gospel effectively so that people respond in conversion and discipleship. EVANGELIST: someone who uses their gift of evangelism to a greater extent than others with the gift.

**THE SPEAKING GIFTS:** KNOWLEDGE: someone who is gifted to observe and discover Bible truths and then make conclusions and applications. WISDOM: insight from the Holy Spirit into how knowledge and truth may best be applied to specific needs and situations. TEACHING: ability to communicate information in such a way that others understand and learn. PREACHING: really called "Prophecy," the ability to proclaim God's truth with clarity and apply it to the needs of the listeners so they benefit and grow from it.

**THE SERVING GIFTS:** SERVICE: the ability to identify unmet needs and make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish a task. MERCY: can feel genuine empathy and compassion for others suffering distress (physically, mentally or emotionally) and to turn that compassion into lovingly done deeds designed to help alleviate pain. HELPS: ability to use skills or talents to enable others to increase the effectiveness of their duties. "Service" is a sacrificial act, "mercy" is a compassionate attitude and "helps" is a useful action. GIVING: contributing material resources to a need with liberality and cheerfulness. HOSPITALITY: providing an open house and warm welcome to those in need of food or lodging in such a way that the recipient feels welcome and loved. ENCOURAGEMENT: sharing words of comfort, consolation, encouragement or counsel to others in such a way that they feel helped and encouraged.

**THE SPECIAL GIFTS:** FAITH: A Spirit-given supernatural capacity for believing God. INTERCESSION: ability to regularly pray for extended periods of time for the needs of others and seeing specific answers to their prayers (to a greater degree than the average Christian). DISCERNMENT: ability to know with assurance whether certain behavior or truth is in reality divine, human or satanic and insight as to what to do about it. EXORCISM: insight into Satan's workings and how to deliver people from the work of demons in their lives. CELIBACY: ability to remain single and enjoy it without suffering undue loneliness or sexual temptation. VOLUNTARY POVERTY: replace material comfort and luxury with a life-style equivalent to those living in a given society in order to better minister to them. MARTYRDOM: the special ability God gives to some to undergo suffering for the faith, even to death, which displaying a joyous and victorious attitude that brings glory to God.

There are other gifts the Spirit can give to people as there is a need for them. In addition, there are unlimited numbers of blends and combinations of these gifts. Think of the three basic colors: yellow, red and blue. From various combinations of these three colors thousands of blends and shades can be made, really a limitless number of colors. God gives each believer, at the moment of salvation, their own unique mixture of gifts that fit perfectly with their natural talents and

skills to form their individual contribution to the Body of Christ. (There will be more about spiritual gifts in future blogs.)

**2 Timothy 1:6** *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

*Think of Christians in your church or circle of friends. Can you identify the gifts they may have?*

*Thank God for them and pray for them as they serve God.*

## **FIND YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT MIX**

I am amazed and humbled by what God does through me using the gifts the Spirit gave me. The older I get the more I am aware that they are God-given abilities, not skills or talents I developed on my own. God has given me a unique combination of gifts, just like He blends the basic colors to form an unending amount of colors and hues. For example, I am gifted in the areas of teaching (“Knowledge,” “Teaching,” “Preaching”) and organization (“Administration”). That enables me to research, write and organize these blogs. I also am able to counsel (“Wisdom”) and minister in spiritual warfare (“Exorcism”). These are all combined together in my unique blend of gifts and talents. On the other hand, I am very poor at witnessing (“Evangelism”) and prayer (“Intercession”). That does not mean I am not responsible to do them, as all believers are, but it does mean they don’t come naturally to me and I’m not very effective at them – but I still do my best with them. I thank God for others gifted in those areas to balance out my gifts in the Body.

***How can I discover my spiritual gifts?*** There are many good web sites that have tests you can take to help you find your spiritual gift mix, but it’s really very simple. Think of what you enjoy doing at church or with other Christians. Where would you choose to serve? What interests you? As you try your hand at some of these things, where do you find yourself effective? What do others admire about you and ask you to do? Work in those areas, using your gifts in or out of church. It takes time to train and refine them so be patient. Look for ways you can be trained, mentored or in any way improve what you do. I’m very introverted and don’t like public attention but God gave me a strong burden to teach youth when I was young. As I stumbled along I eventually got experience and training so I was more efficient and effective. Just like a talent you may be born with, a spiritual gift also takes time and training to improve and become better at something.

It’s important each believer knows and uses their gift for the health of the Body. Every Christian and every gift is important. Have you ever hurt your little toe walking in the dark at night? How much does that one tiny piece of bone and flesh affect the rest of your body? Or suppose a car had some parts that weren’t functioning? That would cut down on the effectiveness of the rest of the parts, no matter how well they did their job. Some may be more essential, like leadership in a church, but each one has its part and is important. There are no extra or unnecessary parts. That’s why the whole Body suffers when a Christian droops out of church and isn’t part of a local body, or lives in sin and doesn’t let the Spirit work through them.

A good army is composed of many soldiers who have different positions, weapons, tasks, assignments and responsibilities. But they work together to form an unbeatable unit. If they don’t function well together they will be defeated. They don’t fight alone but in harmony with others. That’s the way God designed the church. We need each member of the Body to use their gift for the benefit of all. No Christian can function as God created them to function on their own. You are part of the greatest army in the world. Are you doing your part? Is it stronger because of you or are you a weak spot where the enemy is able to infiltrate? (There will be more about spiritual gifts in future blogs.)

**1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.**

*What would God say about how you are using the gifts He gave you? How do you feel when you give someone a special gift and they set it aside and don't use it?*

*How can you better use your gifts for the Body of Christ and glory of God?*

## **SO YOU'RE GIFTED**

So you're gifted – at least that's what they tell you. You've done some reading about spiritual gifts and seem to have a good grasp of the concept, at least as it applies to others. But unfortunately God doesn't send out spiritual gift evaluations, so you are a bit unsure just what spiritual gifts you have or don't have. How can you better understand and make the most of the gifts He has given you?

Learning about spiritual gifts is a good first step. There are many fine books and web sites that offer insightful and practical information. This can be a good start, but it is only a start. You must practice using your gifts. That means functioning in the role God has assigned to you, doing what you are burdened to do and ministering as best you can in ways that are available to you. Even the most accomplished swimmer wasn't world-class the first time he got into a pool.

One of the best ways to find out where you are gifted is through the feed-back of others. What are you asked to do? For what reasons do people come to you? Where do you get positive reinforcement about your contribution? These are good ways of discovering how God is working through you. A spiritual gift is something you enjoy doing (have a desire/burden to do) and something you are able to do – maybe not as well as you'd like but certainly better than the average Christian.

Don't limit what God is doing in you. God gives us a variety of spiritual gifts, a special 'mix' that is unique to each of us. There are 3 basic colors but thousands of combinations can be made from them. That's how it is with spiritual gifts. We each have a unique combination of gifts that blend with our personality and spiritual development. That makes each of us unique. Still, it can be good to try and find someone who has at least some of the gift mix you see in yourself and have that person mentor you. If it is a local person you can spend time with them. If it is someone in the Bible, church history or on the national scene today you can still study their life to see what you can learn to apply to your own growth. Remember that God will gift you, but He will also stretch you. My primary spiritual gift is teaching, but I've always been shy and uncomfortable speaking to groups of people. God didn't make a mistake, He's stretching me, just like He's stretching you. Anyway, the best advice I can give you as to how to develop your gift is to use it. Focus on it in your ministry. Be alert to opportunities to use it for God's glory. Remember it is His gift for His glory. We use it for Him, not for ourselves.

**1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.**

**Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 12 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.. There are different kinds of service, but**

***the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.***

*If you were describe your gift mix, what spiritual gifts would you say you have? What is the balance between them (which is the main gift, which supplement other gifts, etc.)?*

*What would your mate or close friends say about the list you have written?*

*What can you do to further develop the gifts god has given you?*

*Is there any way you are holding back in using your gifts, any way you are resisting the way God is stretching you through using your gift? Apologize to God now and make yourself totally available to Him.*

### **IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE GIFT OF TEACHING...**

Good! At least I think its mostly good. Shepherds are responsible to feed their sheep, and God gives many the ability to do this by teaching. So being a teacher is good. The 'bad' part is that God holds us accountable for all we learn and pass on to others (James 3:1). Along with the privilege there is a responsibility to use it and an accountability to apply His truth to our own lives.

How do you know if you have the gift of teaching? When you communicate biblical truth to others, do they seem to grasp what you are saying? Do you enjoy trying to make a biblical concept understandable to others? Do stories, illustrations or examples of what you are talking about come to mind when speaking? Do you have a desire to learn the Bible better and to help others learn it as well? Have people responded that you have helped them better understand the Bible? Then teaching is part of your spiritual gift mix.

The gift of teaching is the special ability God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to communication information relevant to the health and ministry of the listeners in a way that they will learn and be edified. Feeding the sheep is a wonderful privilege. Like the farmer who first benefits from the crops, so we who teach benefit most from the information God is passing on through us. Don't take credit for God's gift, don't let pride get in the way. Always make Jesus the One in focus, not yourself or your gift. Say as John said, "He must increase, I must decrease." We are not trying to impress others so we can build our kingdom, we are trying to feed others so they can grow and increase God's kingdom. Thank God for those who fed you, and ask Him to use you to feed those He brings into your life.

***Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,***

***John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ... "Take care of my sheep." ... "Feed my sheep."***

***1 Corinthians 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers.***

*Do you feel God has given you teaching as part of your spiritual gift mix?*

*What are you doing to develop your gift? (reading about teaching, taking teaching or speaking classes, attending workshops, learning from someone with the gift of teaching, etc.)*

*Do you work hard at your teaching, doing original research and developing good lesson plans? Or do you wing it and coast on your 'gift of gap' to make your lessons interesting?*

*Do you in any way steal glory from God by using your gift to bring attention or focus on yourself? If so, confess it and humble yourself before God.*

## **MUST YOU HAVE THE GIFT OF LEADERSHIP TO WORK WITH OTHERS?**

Like many other pastors, I first cut my teeth in ministry by being a youth pastor. While God has graciously gifted me in several ways, leadership and people skills are not among them. I am not a good motivator, nor do I easily draw people to me and my cause. That made it quite hard to lead the youth in the church where I worked. I attracted the serious ones and could disciple them, but I envied those who could be cool with all the kids and attract their admiration and loyalty. Maybe you understand how I felt.

Is leadership part of your spiritual gift mix? Do you enjoy inspiring and leading others for the sake of Christ's work? Are you quick to sense when a group needs direction and then able to step up and do something about it? Do others look to you for leadership and guidance? Are you able to motivate others to strive for goals you feel are important? Do you think of future accomplishments and how to bring them about? If so, you have leadership gifts.

The gift of leadership is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to set goals in accordance with God's purpose for the future and communicate those goals to others so that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish them for the glory of God. Often administration/organization accompanies this gift so the leader is better able to move forward in his plans. As with any privilege God gives, however, there is a responsibility to use it for Him and an accountability factor as well. 1 Timothy 3 lists characteristics a leader must have: without fault, sober, self-controlled, orderly, welcoming of strangers, gentle and peaceful, not greedy, able to manage his family and children, mature in the faith and respected by others. This gift must always be exercised under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We must at all times remember they are HIS sheep, not ours. We are just the under shepherd. But isn't it a great privilege to be on God's leadership team?

***Romans 12:8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.***

***1 Thessalonians 5:12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.***

***John 21:16 Jesus said to Peter, "Take care of my sheep."***

*What is your plan to keep your focus on Jesus and not let your ego needs rise to the surface? How do you keep from using your leadership ability feed your own pride?*

*Who is your example as a leader? Find someone in life, in the Bible, or in history whom you admire as a leader and study their life.*

*What are you doing to further develop your leadership abilities? There are many fine books, web sites and workshops available. We are responsible to develop our abilities, not coast on them.*

*Ask God to show you how you can be a better leader to those who follow you. Sit quietly for a few moments and listen to what He would say to you.*

## **WHAT IF I'M NOT BILLY GRAHAM?**

Everyone is required to share the good news of Jesus with those they come in contact with, but some seem to be much better at it than others. These few are relaxed, positive, motivated and seem to enjoy each opportunity to share. What makes them different than the rest of us? God has included evangelism as part of their spiritual gift mix.

Do you like to talk to people about Jesus, especially those who don't know Him? Are you able to share the gospel in a way that is clear and understandable for others? Do you look for opportunities to share the plan of salvation? Has God used you to help bring unbelievers to salvation? Do you come away from times of sharing the gospel with great encouragement and enthusiasm? If you do, evangelism is part of your spiritual gift mix.

The gift of evangelism is the special ability that God gives to believers to present the Gospel to unbelievers in a clear and meaningful way which calls for a response. Remember this must be done in love. If you don't feel love for the person but are just looking for another notch on your spiritual gun handle for making another 'kill,' you aren't truly representing Jesus. Witnessing isn't a game or a challenge to see who 'wins.' The best way I've heard it put is that it is one beggar showing another beggar where to get bread. Some are just better at this than others because they are gifted by God.

What if you don't have this gift? Can you still minister with youth and others? Of course! If God didn't give you this gift He didn't want you to have it! No gift is better than any other gift. We thank God for those with the gift of evangelism for they are the spiritual obstetricians that bring new life into the church. But we need pediatric doctors, family doctors, etc., to help these new ones grow. If evangelism isn't your gift don't feel left out. Still, we are responsible to share the gospel with others. I find the best way to do this is to be just what God tells us to be – a witness. A witness doesn't argue a point, he just relates what he knows. He shares personal experience. When I realize that is what God wants me to do then I find it is much easier than acting like a lawyer trying to argue people into the truth. I share what Jesus has done for me and God uses that in mighty ways. After all, He does promise that He will use His Word for His glory.

***Ephesians 4:7, 11 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,***

***Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

*Do you have evangelism as part of your spiritual gift mix? If so, what are you doing to develop it? (do you attend seminars or conferences, practice using it whenever you can, read about great soul winners in the past, find a present day mentor who can help you, etc.)*

*If you don't have the gift of evangelism, are you using that as an excuse to not share the gospel as often as you can? If you struggle with this, write out your testimony (your witness) so you can say it in 2 to 3 minutes. God will take it from there.*

*Write down the names of several people you have spoken to about Jesus in the last year. Pray for them now and continue to remember them when you pray.*

*If you have the gift or not, ask God to give you opportunities to speak for Him this day. Then be alert for them.*

## **DO YOU HAVE A SHEPHERD'S HEART?**

One of my favorite titles for a pastor is 'shepherd.' The term speaks of tender, loving care, of responsibility and oversight for those who would not prosper without it. A shepherd's is someone with a caregiver's heart, someone who has others they oversee and build into spiritually. It could be a pastor, youth worker, children's helper, mother or father.

Are you concerned about the spiritual needs of the people around you? Do you long to see them grow in the Lord? Do you have a burden and desire to help them, encourage them, rejoice with them, love them and assist them in any way possible? Do you give of yourself because of a concern for the ones you are ministering to? A shepherd must love his sheep in order to lay down his life for his sheep, and youth pastors lay down their lives for their teenage sheep every day.

The gift of pastor or shepherd is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers. So yes, youth pastors are definitely pastors. The Greek word translated 'pastor' refers to the caring, protecting feeding and leading of sheep. Jesus calls Himself the "Good Shepherd." Since He is not physically on earth, he calls some of us to be assistant shepherds to help care for His sheep. This is a great privilege and a wonderful calling. There is none higher. But it also entails responsibility and accountability. After all, they are HIS sheep, not ours. He owns them, not us. He brings growth, we are just the channel He sometimes uses. When they rejoice, we rejoice. But when they stray or are in pain, we hurt with them and for them. In that way we represent Christ and show in a very real way just what Jesus is like. Those we shepherd should see a glimpse of the Great Shepherd in us. What a wonderful privilege and great challenge that is!

***Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,***

***1 Peter 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. NIV***

***1 Timothy 4:12-15 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.***

*Take some time to identify the gift of pastor (shepherd) in your life. Write down your thoughts and burdens for those around you.*

*What can you do to be a better shepherd, to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ in how you care for your sheep.*

*Every sheep needs a shepherd. Who is your shepherd? Who do you look to and go to? If you're trying to function without a shepherd of your own you like a sheep trying to make it on his own. That just doesn't work for long.*

*Spend some time thanking God for the wonderful privilege He has given you of being a shepherd of some of His sheep!*

## **WHAT ARE SOME SPIRITUAL GIFTS?**

As soon as a child starts to walk and talk he wants to “help” around the house. He tries to do little things to assist others. While he isn’t able to do much at first, still he tries and tries. He feels great when he can make a contribution and ‘help’ someone.

The same is true in God’s family. A new believer isn’t able to do a lot at first, but there should be a strong desire to do what they can. It is natural to want to contribute to the spiritual family and help in any way possible. Parents train their children to be able to contribute. God gives His children spiritual gifts to help us contribute to others.

**SPIRITUAL GIFTS** At the moment of salvation one of the many blessings we receive are spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12) These are enablements the Spirit provides for each one. Just as each person has a unique set of talents, each believer has a unique set of spiritual gifts. These are different than talents. These are special skills/abilities that God’s Holy Spirit gives each believer to minister to others in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

Spiritual gifts are not given to be used for one’s own benefit. They are for the purpose of ministering to others in the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). If you’re not using your gift, other Christians around you aren’t benefitting as they should.

Each believer has a unique combination of gifts. Just like three colors, yellow, red and blue, are blended in various combinations to form thousands of colors, so these basic gifts are blended with others to form a unique combination in each believer. No two of us are gifted exactly alike.

**Pastor**: The gift of pastor is the special ability to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers.

**Teaching**: The gift of teaching is the special ability to communicate information relevant to the health and ministry of the body and its members in such a way that others will learn.

**Preaching**: The gift of preaching is the special ability to proclaim the written Word with clarity and to apply it to a particular situation with a view to correction or edification and spiritual growth.

**Leadership**: The gift of leadership is the special ability to set goals in accordance with God’s purpose for the future and to communicate these goals to others in such a way that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish these goals for the glory of God.

**Evangelism**: the gift of evangelism is the special ability to proclaim the Good News of salvation effectively so that individuals or groups of people may respond to the claims of Christ in conversion and discipleship.

**Missionary**: the gift of missionary is the special ability to minister whatever other spiritual gifts they have in a second culture.

**Administration**: The gift of administration is the special ability to understand clearly the immediate and long-range goals of a particular unit of the body of Christ and to devise and execute plans for the accomplishment of those goals.

**Knowledge**: The gift of knowledge is the special ability to observe Biblical facts and make conclusions, to study and understand the Bible in a special, deep way.

**Wisdom**: The gift of wisdom is the special ability to know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how given knowledge may be applied to specific needs arising in the Body of Christ.

**Service**: The gift of service is the special ability to identify the unmet needs involved in a task related to God's work and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired results.

**Mercy**: The gift of mercy is the special ability to feel genuine empathy and compassion for individuals who suffer distressing physical, mental or emotional problems and to translate that compassion into cheerfully done deeds that reflect Christ's love and alleviate the suffering.

**Helps**: The gift of helps is the special ability to invest the talents they have in the life and ministry of other members of the Body so the other can increase the effectiveness of their spiritual gifts.

**Giving**: The gift of giving is the special ability to contribute material resources to the work of the Lord with liberality and cheerfulness.

**Hospitality**: The gift of hospitality is the special ability to provide an open house and a warm welcome to those in need of food and lodging.

**Encouragement**: The gift of encouragement is the special ability to minister words of comfort, consolation, encouragement and counsel to other members of the Body in such a way that they feel helped and healed.

**Faith**: The gift of faith is the special ability to exercise a supernatural capacity for believing God.

**Intercession**: The gift of intercession is the special ability to pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to their prayers (to a degree much greater than that which is expected of the average Christian).

**Discernment**: The gift of discernment is the special ability to know with assurance whether certain behavior or truth purported to be of God is in reality divine, human or satanic.

**Exorcism**: The gift of exorcism is the special ability to understand Satan's workings and know how to stop the work of demons in people's lives.

**HOW TO DISCOVER YOUR GIFTS** First, get to work helping and serving others in any way you can. You will find some ways easier and more enjoyable than others. There will be some areas of service which others recognize as being something you are good at and they will ask you to minister in those ways. You won't be able to do everything, and you won't be good at everything you try. But those ways of ministering to others which you enjoy and are good at are the ways God has gifted you. It will be a combination of the gifts listed above and is different for everyone.

When you find areas where you are able to serve with good results learn more about them and look for more opportunities to perform these things. Find others who seem to be good at one of the things you can do and like to do. Learn from them how to better minister in these ways. Dedicate these abilities to God and use them. You will continue to improve throughout your whole life as you serve Jesus and others in the family of God.

## **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY TODAY 1 – OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

Have ever been told: "The Lord told me to tell you..." "The Lord showed me that you..." "God spoke to me about you..." "I have a message from God for you..."? I remember the first time a person came up to me and said God had told them to tell me something. This was an outspoken Christian person known for their faith and commitment. Still, I immediately wondered why God didn't tell me Himself if He had something to say to me. Was I not listening? Was there something I was missing in my walk with the Lord or with my theology? I had not experienced this before. I was

confused. I was uncomfortable because God was using a medium to contact me. Mediums are forbidden by God (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Still, this person carried considerable status in the Christian community and people would ask them about important decisions or Bible interpretation, feeling their words carried more authority than anyone else's. It sometimes seemed they were preferred over the Bible for it was quicker and easier to ask them than study and pray. They said it was their spiritual gift. Still, it never felt right in my spirit.

Spiritual gifts are to bring unity, yet "prophecy" is one of the most divisive because of the differing ways it is interpreted and applied. Some teach that modern-day prophets exist. Others claim their role ended in the first century. What does the Bible teach?

**"Prophecy"** refers to speaking God's message to His people. The Hebrew word for prophecy is 'naba', meaning "to speak by divine inspiration" or "to declare a message from God." The New Testament uses the Greek word 'propheteuo', which means "to speak forth" or "to proclaim God's truth." It refers to the forth-telling of God's will. "Pro" means "forth" and 'phemi' means "to speak." So, the basic meaning of the word is "to speak forth." While "fore-telling" (predicting a future event) was sometimes part of what was spoken, mainly it was used for proclaiming truth divinely revealed by God. 'Forth-telling' is proclaiming God's truth as He has revealed it. Thinking of the word "proclaim" instead of "prophecy" removes a lot of the confusion and wrong emphasis. Prophets spoke forth God's truth, warned of the consequences of disobedience, called the people to repentance, revealed future events and offered eternal hope and encouragement.

**Old Testament Prophets** heard from God and repeated the message to others. Sometimes it was about a future event, but the most of the time it was a message of repentance from sin or instruction about serving God in daily life. These messages come in various forms, like visions or poems. Whenever God works, Satan counterfeits and confuses. To tell truth from false prophecy God gave guidelines. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 stipulates that false prophets who presumptuously claim to speak in the name of God are to be put to death, while genuine prophets are expected to speak only what God commands them. If a person prophesied a future event that didn't occur, he or she would be considered false and stoned to death. This underscored the prophetic ministry's seriousness. While we aren't under Old Testament law today, it's still God's standard that anyone who speaks for Him must be 100% accurate. That applies to those who claim to be prophets today. The proof of a true prophet was and still is total accuracy to the smallest detail.

We have God's complete written revelation today in the Bible, but that wasn't always available. Much of it was revealed prophetically was new information for the people. Some of this was written down and comprises the Bible we have and use. Several whole books in the Bible were written by men who were regarded as prophets. In the Old Testament, prophets would address Israel's moral condition, always related to their commitment to the Lord. The prophets pointed out specific sin and urged a repentant return to God and His blessings if they would worship Him first and follow the Laws. Prophets also spoke of future events, giving oracles regarding what God would one day do as consequence for continued sin or deliverance if the people would repent and stay faithful. As examples, Isaiah and Jeremiah warned of impending judgment for Israel's disobedience. At the same time, they would offer hope for redemption since God would one day bring the people back. God would stay true to his covenant.

The priesthood was passed down through families in the tribe of Levi. However, prophets received direct callings from God. They didn't seek power or personal gain but spoke God's word with His authority. Therefore they often found themselves in trouble with human authority or the people because of their messages of sin and repentance.

Outstanding Old Testament prophets included Moses (Exodus 3-4; Deuteronomy 34:10), Elijah (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2), Elisha (2 Kings 2-13), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-10), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel

and many more. Most were faithful to God no matter the cost, but some, like Balaam, prostituted their gift to gain money and position (2 Peter 2:15). Satan's counterfeiting of the gift of prophecy was not only among the Jews but also in the other nations. People outside Israel were also aware of an unseen world and sought insight from the powers around them.

The prophets spoke of God's redemptive plan. Along with the Messiah being a suffering servant (Isaiah 53) and the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), the Old Testament prophets began writing about a return to Jerusalem and a new kingdom of peace and abundance in the future.

The gift of prophecy is a special, very important enablement from God for His people. Yet it must only be used as God gives a message, never for ones' own financial or social benefit, like with Balaam. Those who preach or proclaim the Word are to be respected and honored (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15). But they must be held accountable to the Word and never add to it or take away from it (Revelation 22:18-19). Pastors, evangelists, teachers and others practice this gift as God gives ability and insight. Thank God for these modern-day 'prophets.' Pray for them and listen to them. (We'll look at Prophecy in the New Testament in the next blog.)

***2 Peter 1:20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***

*Who have you listened to who is a faithful and gifted proclaimer of God's truth? Thank God for them and pray that God will continue to use them and their ministry.*

## **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY TODAY 2 – NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

In the previous blog we saw that "Prophecy" literally means "to speak forth." It is used for one who is gifted by God to proclaim or preach His truth. Mainly it was for forth-telling (preaching), only sometimes for fore-telling (predicting future events) and when someone fore-tell an event, it had to be 100% accurate or they were a false prophet and put to death. The Old Testament is full of prophets who spoke for God and whose messages were recorded for us. But the gift of prophet changed after the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost (Acts 2).

**Prophecy in the New Testament** is different than in the Old. In the Old Testament, only a select few of God's people were called to be prophets. In the New Testament, with the new covenant, God expands the prophetic gift to all believers. Through the Holy Spirit, every Christian hears the voice of God for themselves and can speak His message to others in the community and the church.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and fulfilled Joel's prophecy. "*Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams*" (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-29). Joel's prophecy spoke of a time when all of God's people would participate in the prophetic, a major shift from the Old Testament model. Paul later writes about this in 1 Corinthians 14:1, encouraging all believers to desire the gift of prophecy, essentially hearing from God and repeating his messages to others, because it strengthens, encourages, and comforts the church.

Old Testament prophets spoke for God because there was no written revelation from Him. The New Testament prophecy focuses more on proclaiming truth than specific future judgments and warnings. In the New Testament, prophecy still happens but makes a dramatic shift through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Unlike the Old Testament, where God called only a select few to act as prophets, the New Testament sees the Spirit empowering every Christian to hear and speak God's message.

In addition, though, God gifts some special men and women with the gift of prophecy so they can communicate God's truth to others in a way they can understand it and apply it to their daily lives. All believers are to evangelize, but only some are given the gift of evangelize. All believers are to proclaim God's Word, but only a few are given the gift of prophecy/preaching. As are all the spiritual gifts, its purpose is to build up the Body of Christ. The New Testament highlights the role of prophets within the early Christian church as foundational to its growth and development. Ephesians 4:11-12 identifies prophecy as one of the gifts given by Christ to the church for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ, and attaining unity in the faith.

**Examples of New Testament Prophets.** Each of the four Gospels in the New Testament begins with a prophet, John the Baptist, who prepares the way for Jesus. John the Baptist is himself a fulfillment of Malachi in the Old Testament (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). The book of Acts gives several more examples of prophets.

**New Testament Prophets who Fore-told.** While prophecy in the whole Bible is mainly forth-telling (preaching or proclaiming God's Word), there is much fore-telling in the Old and some continues in the early church as well (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10; Ephesians 4:11). In Acts 11:27-30, Agabus predicts a famine for the Judea. The early church felt this message was from God, so they responded with generosity, giving food and other resources to the Christians in Judea.

Agabus shows up again in Acts 21:10-14, which also includes his daughters as prophets. In this passage, Agabus gives Paul a prophecy. He ties his hands and feet to symbolize how Paul will be arrested and imprisoned if he goes to Jerusalem. Others hear this and believe it, discerning its truth, and try to convince Paul to change his plans. However, while Paul agrees with the prediction of his arrest, he felt led by God to continue anyway, accepting his fate. *"I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21:13). Even though Paul received an accurate prophecy about his future, he had his own free will choice about what he would do and he chose to go ahead anyway, knowing the consequences. He was following the leading of the Spirit inside him.

In Acts 21:9, we read about Philip the evangelist's four unmarried daughters, who are described as prophetesses. Their prophetic ministry underscores the inclusivity of prophecy within the early Christian community and highlights the active role of women in proclaiming God's word. The Bible doesn't tell us if they ministered to just women and children, or to men as well. A companion of the apostle Paul, Silas is identified as a prophet in Acts 15:32, where he and Judas (Barsabbas) are sent to deliver a letter concerning Gentile believers. Silas's prophetic role in the early church indicates the ongoing importance of prophetic ministry in guiding and strengthening the Christian community.

Although Barnabas is primarily known for his role as an encourager and companion to Paul, Acts 13:1 identifies him as a prophet within the church in Antioch. His prophetic ministry likely involved teaching, exhortation, edification, and guidance for the growing community of believers.

So, we see the gift of prophet continues on in the New Testament. The Old Testament was written, but not the New so it was important for God to reveal His truth through people who would pass His message on to others. That's our privilege, and responsibility, today as well. (In the next, and final blog about prophecy, we'll see how this gift is to be used today.)

***Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;***

*When is the last time you have shared truth about God with someone, believer or unbeliever?*

Thank God for the opportunity and pray He would provide more chances today. Be alert to them.

### **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY TODAY 3 – MODERN DAY PROPHETS**

In the Old Testament, prophets were people who spoke forth God's truth. Most was forth-telling (preaching/proclaiming known truth) but a lot was fore-telling (predicting a future event) because the Scriptures were in the process of being written and God was revealing new truths as time went on. This continued in the early church. But what about today, when we have God's revealed Word and are told not to take anything from it or add anything to it (Revelation 22:18-19; Deuteronomy 4:2)? Is the gift of prophecy for today and, if so, just how it is to be used?

**New Testament standards for prophets.** Prophecy is named among the gifts of the Spirit which Paul lists in Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Ephesians 4:11. Paul encourages believers not to despise prophecies but to test everything, holding to what is good. *"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22). As in the Old Testament, prophecies, both forth-telling and fore-telling, must line up with Scripture or be rejected.

Unfortunately, some people today put prophecy above Scripture but that is not what God says. Scripture comes first and if something said doesn't agree with Scripture it must be rejected along with the one proclaiming it. 1 John 4:1 teaches Christians to test the spirits, holding them to God's revealed truth, similar to the theological test from the Old Testament. The church, then, has been empowered to discern whether a message comes from God. The Spirit within us bears witness to it, and we should follow it. No one who claims to be a prophet is above God's Word. All he says and does is to be evaluated by it. None are exempt. So, turn to the Word for guidance and direction, not to a person who claims to speak for God. Go to Him directly!

The same goes for your pastor. When prophets speak (what we would consider a sermon), the church considered the message. We see that with the Bereans who checked Paul's teachings with the Scriptures they had (Acts 17:11). Since each person and the whole church has access to the Spirit of God, the community can affirm a message as one from God or not (1 Corinthians 14:9). The criteria no longer depends upon a position or title but the work and Word of God. True prophetic messages will affirm the Bible, not contradict it.

**YOU are a prophet!** While some today are specially gifted in prophecy (preaching or proclaiming) so they can accurately communicate God's Word, every believer to some extent has the Spirit-given ability to proclaim God's Word. Paul says it is the greatest gift which all should desire (1 Corinthians 14:1). He recognizes that it is God's Word that has the power to change lives, encourage, educate and build up. God promises to give us the words we need when we share them with others (Matthew 10:19-20).

**Abusing the gift of Prophecy.** Unfortunately, some leaders abuse the gift for personal gain or control, which misleads people from the truth and causes harm to individuals or whole churches. Those who speak for God are held to a higher standard and judgment than others (James 3:1), so using this gift to gain attention or exercise authority over others is a grave misuse of it and puts one in danger of God's discipline.

**False teachers today.** *"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

**Satan can counterfeit Prophecy.** Just because someone is a good communicator doesn't mean they are from God. Demons can give people a counterfeit gift of prophecy as well. *“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’ She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment the spirit left her” (Acts 16:16-18).* The demons were giving this girl information about people and their future which her owners used to make money through her fortunetelling. Just because someone accurately predicts something is going to happen doesn't mean that knowledge came from God.

We have a strong warning in *Matthew 7:21-23*: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’* Satan deceived Eve and has been perfecting his craft ever since. Without God's discernment and the Word of God we are no match for his deception. A good counterfeit must look as much like the original as possible. Don't be fooled by those who claim to be speaking for God but say things not supported by Scripture. *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:3, 13-15).*

The word of God should be our guide. We should watch out and be wary of miracles, signs and wonders which do not have the Cross of Christ at their center! Any miracles, signs and prophecies that are out of alignment with the word of God are a mere deceit and poison from the pit of hell. Such should be resisted. That is the truth contained in the scripture as proclaimed by Paul.

Prophecy—declaring the message of God—stands at the heart of the whole Bible, a divinely inspired collection of writings. The apostles wrote about prophets in Acts and themselves guided the early church by giving messages inspired by the Spirit. It is an honor and privilege to speak God's words to others. All Christians are to do it. Those with the gift of prophecy/preaching/proclaiming are especially accountable to be true and accurate in what they do. Everything we know and have is based on God's written Word. It's our joy to proclaim it – just make sure you do it accurately.

***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).***

*Have you been listening to any teaching which you aren't sure lines up with God's Word but the speaker seems very convincing? Pray and ask God to give you wisdom to discern error whenever you hear it.*

## **THE BIBLE AND THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

We in the USA have a higher standard of living than almost anyone anytime, yet suicide and emotional problems are at a record high. We hear about the tragic lives of those who won instant riches in the lottery. We read books like the Great Gatsby which show the emptiness of a life of

wealth. We know earthly riches don't fill our deepest needs. Yet it's hard to be satisfied with what we have and not want more. This isn't only true of unbelievers, but we as Christians are often just as guilty. That is seen today in the emphasis on the so-called "prosperity gospel."

We know that our sovereign God cares about us and promises to answer prayers offered in faith, yet it is hard to understand how a loving, compassionate God can let His children suffer in hardship and want when it is easy for Him to provide for their every desire. Jesus died to give us a wonderful eternity with God in heaven. So why couldn't He also shower us with wealth, health and happiness in this life? After all, it's much easier to ask unbelievers to follow a God who gives them riches than One who offers temptations, struggles and hardships? Even in Job's day it was assumed that God's blessing was seen in health and financial prosperity. That was true in Bible times as well (Amos 4:1-3; 6:1-7). Lack of financial blessing was seen as a sure sign of God's disapproval. Many today see it the same way now.

There are popular authors and teachers today who promise financial wealth, physical healing and prosperity in all areas of life. Millions of Christians worldwide believe in these teachings and follow them. How could they all be wrong, especially when the preachers can seem so convincing. Is it our own fault for not having enough faith?

It would be great if God promised us blessings and health if we just claimed it, but He doesn't. Those are dangerous, destructive lies of Satan that cause much damage to the faith of many. They put false guilt on people who are told their problems come from lack of faith. How can I be so sure the prosperity Gospel is false and dangerous? Because God's Word says so. Let's see what the Bible has to say.

The truth is that **wealth draws us from God, it doesn't bring us closer to Him.** *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* (Matthew 19:23-24)

Jesus Himself warned: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21). **Money and wealth can easily become a false god, an idol** we look to in times of need.

Jesus said **wealth is "deceptive" and turns us from God's Word** (Matthew 13:22). This is obvious in the story of the rich young ruler who couldn't put Jesus before his possessions and turned from Jesus (Matthew 19:21-22). The same is true in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16).

Jesus also said, *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets"* (Luke 6:24-26). The disciples who **gave up everything to follow Christ were the ones who were blessed**, even though they were poor and went hungry (Luke 6:20-21).

The prosperity gospel promises God wants us to have lives of ease and comfort. God promised the opposite. In a letter to Timothy, Paul wrote *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). These words came from a man who had suffered persecution multiple times (2 Timothy 3:10-11). His son in the faith should not expect anything different. **Jesus said those who follow Him will be treated as He was treated** (John 15:18-19). No, Jesus does not promise prosperity, but He does promise something better: peace and comfort no matter what we are going through (John 16:33).

Pursuing godliness and being content with necessities in life, like food and clothing, is what the Lord encourages (1 Timothy 6:6-8). Nowhere in the Bible are we told that God desires believers to be wealthy or that we should pursue riches. Instead, **the Bible warns us**, *“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Christians do not follow the Lord to get something in return. We should not give or do good to others with the intention of receiving wealth and good health from the Lord in return. Instead, we faithfully serve our Savior regardless of the risks, losses, or struggles. We take heart knowing that He has overcome and has promised us His peace.

We do not follow Jesus to benefit ourselves but to serve Him, no matter the cost to us. (Jun 30, 2025 Doylestown, PA)

**Hebrews 13:5:** *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*

*Why doesn't God promise you unlimited wealth and perfect health? What would you be like if you had everything you wanted your whole life?*

*Thank Him for His wisdom and commitment to help you grow to become more like Jesus.*

## **DOES GOD WANT US TO SPEAK IN TONGUES TODAY?**

**BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT, SECOND BLESSING, TONGUES & SUCH MATTERS** What a land-mine this subject is! It gets so divisive. I'm sure God hates to see that among His children. I don't write this to be divisive, but God does require each of us to come to our own conclusions on this matter, based on the Bible. I don't try to explain how or why others feel led as they do, I don't in any way judge or condemn them, I only know how God is leading me from His Word. I have thoroughly studied this whole issue with as open a heart as possible, even wishing there were some higher form of spirituality and victory that would take me to a higher plane. Still, I feel totally convinced God is showing me through His Word that these things are not for me nor the people I shepherd. What is happening in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles I do not know. I only know how He leads me.

The Bible teaches that each believer is **filled with the Holy Spirit** at the moment of salvation (I Cor 10:1ff; 12:3; 6:19; Eph. 4:5; Rom. 5:5). One cannot be saved without the Holy Spirit indwelling them (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; I Cor 6:19-20). From there on it is not a matter of getting more of the Holy Spirit but of the Holy Spirit getting more of us! As we totally submit and live a holy life He fills and works through us.

Then what about Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19, when the Holy Spirit came on those who were already believers? **Acts 2** is a one-time, non-repeatable experience (not even repeated in Acts 8, 10 or 19). Just like the Second Person of the Trinity made a unique, one-time entrance into the world through a virgin in a stable, so the Third Person made His entrance in a unique, one-time way. When Jesus came back to earth after the resurrection to the apostles, Paul or John on Patmos, He never repeated the virgin-in-a-stable entrance. Acts 2, also, is non-repeatable.

Acts 2 is a transition, from Old Testament law when the Holy Spirit only indwelt some believers some times, to New Testament grace, when the Holy Spirit indwells all believers for their whole life. The apostles had already accepted Jesus' claims and were saved in the old dispensation, then when the new dispensation started and the Spirit came they naturally would be the first to receive Him in that

way. That is non-repeatable, too. In **Acts 8** we see this same truth applied to half Jews and half Gentiles, in **Acts 10** to Gentiles in Palestine, and in **Acts 19** to Gentiles outside of Palestine. They were similar to Acts 2 to show that Jews and Gentiles were now equal in the same Body, that the same thing happened to each. Each one showed the changeover from Old Testament law to New Testament grace. There had to be a definite time of change, showing the transfer had been made and those believers accepted. Still, what happened was different enough to show that it wasn't Acts 2 repeated again. Those were the only times anything even resembling Acts 2 happened in Acts, and it only happened once for each new group as the gospel spread from Jerusalem. All others received the Holy Spirit immediately at salvation.

**Tongues is not proof of Spirit baptism.** Many received the Holy Spirit but not tongues: 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41), early church believers (Acts 4:31), Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 9:17-18), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-16), Jesus (Lk. 3:21-22; 4:1,14,18,21) and many others (Acts 4:8,31; 6:5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9,52). Speaking in tongues is never mentioned in the leadership qualities in Titus or I Timothy. The Bible makes it clear that obedience is the proof of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, not tongues (Eph 5:18f).

**Tongues in Acts and Corinth were the same.** The same Greek word ('glossa' meaning 'tongue, to speak, language') is always used of known foreign languages and is used in both Acts (2:6-11, etc) and Corinth (I Cor 14:21; 12:10). In Acts is it obvious that the listeners heard known languages spoken by those who had no previous knowledge of the language. There is no indication that what Corinth experienced was different. It is only the church at Corinth that is mentioned as using tongues, and then many corrections were needed because it was a very carnal church (I Cor. 3:1-3).

**The purpose of tongues** was to show Jews that God's judgment was on them. They were to spread God's message to Gentiles but failed. God would show He was judging them for that by bringing His word to them by Gentiles in Gentile languages. This was prophesied in Isa. 28:9-12; 33:19f; Deut 28:49; and Jer 5:15. Paul said tongues fulfilled those prophecies (I Cor 14:21-22). When the Jews didn't heed this sign and repent, God's judgment came upon them in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed. After 70 AD there is no instance of tongues being used in the early church. Signs are placed before what they are to mark, not after! Paul said (I Cor. 13:8-12) that tongues "will be stilled." The Greek word, 'pauo,' is in the middle voice; they will stop by themselves and not start again. History records only a very few, very isolated, very minor outbreak of tongues from Acts to the present. These groups were often heretical in some or all of their other beliefs. Obviously tongues did stop. There is nothing to indicate that they would ever begin again, for their purpose has been fulfilled. When Joel 2 talks about the Holy Spirit coming back after the Tribulation, there is no mention of tongues!

Then what about those with the gift of interpretation? First, the Greek word for this refers to someone who interprets known languages, like from Spanish to German. The use of foreign languages was to show God's judgment to the Jews present. The content of the message was God's good news, which the Jews should have been spreading. Since speaking in an unknown language would mean nothing to Gentiles present, Paul said there had to be an interpreter present when the gift was used (I Cor 14:26-28). This was necessary for the weak and immature Corinthian believers (14:20-22) who were ignorant of God's truth (12:13). It was to be kept to a minimum (14:6-12) because it was an inferior gift (I Cor. 14:4). Paul himself only used his ability to speak in unknown languages in Jewish synagogues, not Jewish services (14:39).

Applying these criteria to tongues today (known foreign language, showing God's judgment on the Jews, used only with Jews present, sees as a lesser/minor gift whose use was to be kept to a minimum, etc.) shows that what is happening today is different from what happened back then.

**Tongues are not a heavenly language.** The Greek word makes it clear they are a KNOWN language (Acts 2:6-11; I Cor 14:21; 12:10). This is different than the 'groanings' of Romans 8:26 for

those are clearly said to be **un**utterable (not able to be spoken). The “tongues of angels” (I Cor. 13:1) is a hyperbole (overemphasis to make a point) like “faith to move mountains.” Besides, when angels spoke in the Bible, it was always in the known language of those to whom they were speaking.

**Tongues are not a private prayer language.** All spiritual gifts are given for the sake of others, not the one having the gift (I Cor 12:7, 12f; 14:19,27), that’s why an interpreter had to always be present in Corinth (I Cor 14:26-28). Every time the gift of tongues was given in the Bible it was given to a group, not an individual. It was always used in a group, too, no instance of private use is recorded. The tongue is to be controlled by the speaker, not beyond his control (I Cor. 14:28-33). Plus, tongues were to be a sign to unbelievers, not believers (I Cor 14:22). Jesus Himself warned about praying words we don’t understand (Mt 6:7). Paul said he always understood what he said when he prayed, even in tongues (I Cor 14:15). When asked how to pray Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer, not tongues.

**Dangers of speaking in tongues today.** Paul warns about Satan’s ability to counterfeit this (I Cor 12:2-3) as he has in other religions and cults today. Tongues is said to be an inferior gift because it is self-centered (I Cor 14:4) and leads to emphasis being put on emotions which can lead people astray (II Cor 6:11-12; Rom 16:17-18). We are told to pray with understanding (I Cor 14:13-17) and control our spiritual gift (I Cor 14:28-40). God arbitrarily chooses which gifts to give to whom (I Cor 12:7,11,18,28). We are told to not seek any particular gift (I Cor 12:31; 14:1-4). Tongues speaking can become a substitute for spirituality (I Cor 14:26-28). Worse of all, it can produce a false security by those who put faith in it as proof that God loves and accepts them. Most who practice tongues-speaking do not believe in eternal security of salvation, so their speaking in tongues becomes their proof of acceptance by God. Our faith must be in Jesus’ work on the cross, not in our ability to speak in ‘tongues.’ Those without the gift can feel pressured to fit in with the rest of the group.

## **QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE EVERYONE SHOULD SPEAK IN TONGUES**

Paul said we should eagerly desire the greater gifts and then he listed them in order of importance putting tongues at the very end (1 Corinthians 12:28), so why is there so much emphasis on it as the most important spiritual gift?

Why don't people desire as strongly to have gifts of mercy or service as they do the gift of tongues?

God has given us the gifts he wants us to have, why would we insult him by asking for a different gift? Do you do that when someone gives you a gift?

Why don't people with the gift of healing go to hospitals and clear them out?

How can people who claim to have the gift of healing say that's a success of their prayer? Depends on the faith of the recipient? That's not true of the use of any of the other gifts like Mercy or service are giving or teaching. Why would the gift of healing require something out of the recipient? And where in Scripture do we find anything that says that?

In the New testament, the public display of the gifts of healing in tongues was to validate the message of the ones claiming to have these gifts. Therefore, it was done in public for everyone to see. Those who claim those gifts today to them inside a church building not in public for unbelievers.

Can a person who does not have the fruit of the Spirit perform signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit? It would seem the fruit would come first and if they weren't dependent on the Spirit for fruit, how could there be Spirit-driven gifts functioning?

Why do people ask me if I speak in tongues? Why don't they ask me what kind of a father or husband I am? And when I tell them I don't, why do they think less of me as a Christian?

## **IS IT GOD'S WILL FOR EVERYONE TO BE HEALED TODAY?**

There are those today who believe that Jesus not only paid for sin on the cross, but that He also paid for our sickness. They say that each is received by faith, if you have enough faith to receive it. Loss of faith, then, causes the loss of these benefits of faith. They claim some are especially gifted in healing and can heal those who come to them. They say God did miracles in the Bible and he is still a miracle-working God today.

What about this? Is this true? This is not just one peripheral issue, but stands very central in our salvation and Christian life. Is God's sovereignty or man's free will the final and ultimate deciding factor? It must be God's sovereignty. The motive for living for Jesus should not be fear of losing our salvation. The goal of living for Jesus should not be a problem free life. Pain and suffering isn't to be faced by whipping up enough 'faith' so that God removes it (or living with the feelings of failure and guilt if it isn't removed and we believe that is our fault by not having enough faith). What about these claims of 'faith healers'? What does the Bible say?

**IS THE GIFT OF HEALING FOR TODAY?** While it's true that Jesus and the Apostles healed, it was done as a sign to authenticate that they were from God (Mt 12:39). This was God's way having people listen to them instead of all the counterfeits around. When they were fully authenticated, there was no longer any reason for the sign. In AD 35 all were healed but by AD 60 some were not (Epaphroditus, Paul's thorn in the flesh). Then by AD 67 very few were being healed (Trophimus was left at Miletus sick, Timothy's stomach was unhealed, etc.). Jerusalem, the scene of many early miracles, had not one miracle done in it after Stephen was stoned. The people had the evidence but rejected it. James, the oldest book in the Bible, says that if someone is sick we are to pray for them (James 5:14).

**SHOULD WE SEE MIRACLES TODAY LIKE IN BIBLE TIMES?** Actually, if you list all the miracles in the Bible you will find almost all of them fit three time periods. They aren't evenly spread out throughout history but cluster in the times of Moses/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha and Jesus/apostles. In each of these times a new mess had developed so God sent a new message through a new messenger whom He authenticated by miracles ("signs"). One more time of miracles is coming, called the Tribulation.

God still uses 'signs' and miracles to show His power in places where His Word is not allowed or just starting to be introduced. They show God's power is greater than the demonic forces they worship. If God can heal a broken body, He can also heal a broken soul. That does not mean any one individual can perform miracles any time anywhere, but God will do these things through whomever He chooses in the time of His choosing.

**IS FAITH A PREREQUISITE FOR HEALING?** Jesus didn't make faith a requirement for healing. Many that He healed didn't have faith. The impotent man at the pool didn't even know who He was. The man with the withered hand and the man with dropsy were healed as a sign to religious leaders who were present, they didn't ask to be healed. The cripple that Peter and Paul healed outside the temple didn't exercise any faith. Of course, the demoniacs who were delivered and those brought back from the dead didn't exercise faith. Then there are others who had strong faith but weren't healed: Stephen, Paul, Timothy, Job, David, Elisha, etc.

**IS 'HEALING' TODAY THE SAME AS IN BIBLE TIMES?** Today's 'healers' must meet the same characteristics of Jesus and the apostles to claim they are doing what was done then. Jesus and the apostles healed with a word or touch wherever and whenever. There was no special place or time, no chants or music, no gimmicks, nothing. Do today's faith healers walk down the hall in a hospital and empty every room? That's how Jesus and Peter did it. Also, Bible miracles were done instantly, not gradually or slowly. There was no healing to 'claim' or lose. Healing was then done totally, not partially, and it was never lost. Everyone was healed. There was no screening done. 100% of every one, no matter the need, was healed. Organic diseases were healed: limbs grew back instantly, strong enough

to walk on, eyes were open, leprosy instantly gone and healthy flesh grown. Then, too, the dead were raised. Today's faith healing doesn't nearly meet these characteristics.

**DOES GOD NOT HEAL?** Yes, a sovereign God can always heal. He is always able to heal, but He is not always willing. Healing isn't guaranteed. Healing isn't based on our having enough faith. Miracles by Jesus and the apostles were done as a sign to authenticate the One who could heal an unseen soul. God can and does heal, but He doesn't gift others to do it, nor does He say that is the recommended norm for His people.

**WHAT ARE WE TO DO WHEN SICK?** When we are sick it's good to first make sure it isn't for sin or disobedience. If there is sin that God is using the sickness to point out, confess it and God will forgive and then use that illness for good (Romans 8:28). It's fine to pray, asking God to heal if that is His will. We are to submit to His will, not demand He do what we want. Ask Him to use the pain and suffering for His glory (that we and others can see His greatness through His provision and peace) and our growth (make us trust Him more and become more like Jesus). Use the best available resources: diet, rest, exercise and medical help. Realize that all healing does ultimately come from God. Leave the results to His will, though.

Granted, this whole subject of faith and healing can be a confusing and guilt-producing area. Specific verses can be found to seemingly support most any view. However, an overview of the Bible and its teaching about these things definitely seems to substantiate the above view of healing. Always remember, our faith must be in Jesus. HE is the object of our faith, never a human person or group. Put faith in Jesus, not faith in your faith! HE is the one we are to look to and glorify. Always keep your eyes on Him. Trust and serve Him no matter what.

## **e. FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

### **YOU CAN'T BE LIKE JESUS BY TRYING TO BE LIKE HIM (Fruit of the Spirit 1)**

A group of Christian laymen involved in missionary work approached a small village near an Amish settlement. Seeking a possible convert, they confronted an Amish farmer and asked him, "Brother, are you a Christian?" The farmer thought for a moment and then said, "Wait just a few minutes." He wrote down a list of names on a tablet and handed it to the lay evangelist. "Here is a list of people who know me best. Please ask them if I am a Christian." (taken from "In Living Faith" by Jimmy Carter). The evidence of faith is fruit. Jesus Himself echoed this same truth when He said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). That still applies today. What if someone asked your closest friends if you were a Christian? Would they say 'yes' without hesitation? That doesn't mean we have to be perfect, but there must be evidence of Christ-like character in our lives. We all want to be more like Jesus, but that isn't something we can do in our own strength. It's not like playing 'Simon Says' where we just mimic some outward actions. We can't become like Jesus by trying to be like Jesus!

Becoming more like Him isn't something that we can produce in our actions. It can only be done as God Himself works inside us to bring about an inner change in attitude and conduct. That's why Paul calls the attributes of Jesus that God wants to reproduce in us 'fruit' (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus says we are branches that hold the fruit which He Himself as the branch produce in us (John 15). Roy Hession says: "Victorious living and effective soul-winning service are not the product of our better selves and hard endeavors, but are simply the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are not called

upon to produce the fruit, but simply to bear it." ("The Calvary Road" Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 13)

That's why we can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him. Only He can do it in us. What we do in our own strength, the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), are tainted by our sin nature and can never make us like Jesus. There is no way that we on our own can whip up such things as unconditional love, inner joy no matter what, peace despite circumstances, patience when things aren't moving fast enough, kindness to those who are unkind to us, goodness to those who are intentionally insensitive to us, faithfulness to those who have been disloyal to us, gentleness to those who have been harsh with us or self-control when our emotions are running all over the place.

So if we can't have these by doing them, how can we get them? We allow God to reproduce them in us as we draw closer to Him. When our intimacy with Jesus grows the fruit just naturally starts to be produced in our lives. When a young child hangs around their parents they start to automatically pick up characteristics of their parents. That happens as we grow in fellowship with Jesus as well. But for us as Christians it even goes beyond that, for the source of these traits is the Holy Spirit Himself inside us producing them as we allow Him full control of our lives. Grow in your relationship with Him and He will grow these in you!

***Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***

***John 15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***

***Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

***Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,***

*Can you think of times in your life when you tried to be like Jesus but failed? What about times you just submitted to Him and felt Him flowing through you and reproducing Himself in you?*

*If there is any sin in your life, any disobedience, any unforgiveness, any failure to do something He wanted you to do, admit (confess) the sin and ask for forgiveness (I John 1:9).*

*Now ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and to do whatever is necessary to replicate Jesus in your life.*

*Are you guilty of trying to get those to whom you minister to just act like Jesus instead of leading them to allow God to reproduce Jesus in through them?*

*Ponder this statement throughout the day, "I can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him." Let it become a part of the basis of your Christian life.*

### **WITH FRUIT ITS ALL OR NOTHING!**

The concept behind a water wheel is very interesting. Did you know that there are overshot waterwheels and undershot? In the one case the water falls from above the wheel to turn it. In the other the water turns the wheel as it flows below it. Which do you think is the more powerful? The first, or course. We, like wheels, are turned by forces from various sources, but too often we move by the undercurrent--mercenary desires and selfish aims drive us. However when we let God's driving

force fall from above we have power beyond anything we can produce on our own. The love God puts in us is far greater than any love we can come up with on our own. So is His joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we allow God to do His work within the result is that He reproduces His fruit in us. Notice Paul doesn't say fruits (plural) although he does use the plural 'acts' for what the flesh produces (Galatians 5:19). The 9 traits listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are not 9 separate traits but all characteristics of one person – Jesus. They aren't set out on a buffet table for us to file by and choose which we want. They are one unit – all or nothing. When God is in control all 9 of these are producing themselves in us, when He isn't in control none of them are there.

Please understand that since we have different personalities, different temperaments, and different strengths and weaknesses that some of these fruit will come more 'naturally' to us and others will be more difficult to grow. Still, God makes all of them equally available. If we are naturally laid back and easy-going, we don't want to mistake that for the fruit of patience. Likewise, if we have a problem with anger we can't blame God for not giving us more self-control. We must make sure we allow Him to produce fruit in the areas of our strength as well as weakness. If the patience we have isn't from Him then it isn't Christ-like, it's just another of the works/acts of the flesh disguised as fruit. It's counterfeit. And just because we may see evidence of 8 of these fruit but find it very hard to allow God to produce the last one, doesn't mean we can coast thinking that 8 out of 9 is pretty good! To be like Jesus we need all 9. Unless His Spirit is producing these in us we won't have them in their entirety. If one is lacking in your life then the full production of the other 8 is being hindered as well. They are all interconnected. They are not separate entities. Don't pick them apart and isolate them as separate qualities but remember they talk about one person – a person becoming more like Christ in what they think and do.

***Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

***Ps 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.***

***Ps 92:12-14 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,***

*Which of these 9 fruit do you find come more naturally to you? In other words, which do you try to do in your own strength? Confess the danger in that and ask God to forgive you for trying to counterfeit His fruit by your own flesh.*

*Which of these 9 fruit do you most need? Which do you lack more than others? Do you make excuses for it, blame it on others, or just ignore it and live with it? If so, then confess that as well as the sin itself. Ask God to show you what you need to do for Him to reproduce Himself in this area as well.*

*Do you focus on some of these fruit to the exclusion of others in your ministry?*

*Pray and ask God to reproduce all His fruit in you, especially in the areas where you are least like Jesus. When situations arise during your day, pray again that He would help you respond as Jesus would have responded.*

## **BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE**

We Americans say we love everything! We love pizza, football and our country. We love Mom, apple pie and American Idol. We love whatever is good and wholesome. But when we say we love everything, we really don't love anything. That cheapens love and puts everything on the same level. Real love is sacrificial and costly, it is unconditional and unselfish. It is for the good of the other and not for our self. This kind of love is commanded by God. Jesus said in John 13:35: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37 say: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Where does this supernatural, unconditional, other-centered love come from? It certainly isn't something we can just decide to start doing one day. Human love is conditional. We love "if" and "because." To love in spite of comes from God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). He produces it in us as we let Him fill us and control us. It comes from Him. It is a response to His love. We love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19). Loving God is one thing He can't force us to do. It's a free will choice we make and that's why our love is so important to Him. Still, His Spirit is the source of the love inside us.

I Corinthians 13 tells us that love is the greatest of all attributes. That's why it is listed first among the fruit in Galatians 5:22-23. All these fruit (not fruits) describe one character, and love is the predominate trait in that character. That is God's outstanding quality and that is also reflected in Jesus' life. Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it this way: "Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's touch. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins."

"Joy is love exalting and peace is love at rest. Patience, love enduring in every trial and test. Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin. Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within. Faith is love's eyes opened, the loving Christ to see. Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary. Temperance, love in harness and under Christ's control. The Christ is love in person, and love, Christ in the soul." (Missionary Dr. Kenneth Moyner).

It's all about love. Joy is love rejoicing. Patience is love enduring. Peace is love trusting. Kindness is love serving. Goodness is love reaching out. Faithfulness is love proving. Gentleness is love touching. Self-control is love restraining. It's all about love. Love is the greatest!

"If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; fortitude without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude. Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love." (Richard P. McBrien) To be like Jesus means to have His love flowing out to others. He makes it available for His people. It's free for the asking – but you have to ask.

***1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... Love never fails. ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

*Read the above verses again, only instead of the word 'love' insert 'Jesus'. Does that describe Jesus?*

*Now read it again and insert your name or 'I' for the word love. How does it sound that way? How well does that describe you?*

*Do those you minister to you know you love them? Would they use 'loving' as one of the first words they choose to describe you?*

*Pick out 1 or 2 of the places where you need improvement. Spend a few minutes praying about them, asking God to make you more like them. Plan some steps you can take to become more like Jesus in these areas.*

## **DO YOU HAVE THE JOY, JOY, JOY, JOY DOWN IN YOUR HEART?**

How do you feel when you hear the Hallelujah chorus? Does it sound joyful to you? We assume Handel must have been overflowing with joy in order to write that fine piece of music and I'm sure that is true. However his joy didn't come from circumstances for his health and his finances had reached the lowest possible place at that time. His right side was paralyzed, he was threatened with debtor's prison because he couldn't pay his bills and he was fighting depression. But when he got his eyes off himself and onto God he was filled with so much joy it overflowed into his masterpiece. Handel was a man of deep faith in God. While writing the Hallelujah chorus a servant hadn't heard from him in some time so he quietly entered Handel's room to find him sitting at his desk with tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked up and said, "I saw all of Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." Now that will bring joy no matter the circumstances!

True joy is not something we can whip up on our own, especially when conditions are unfavorable. Anyone can be happy when life is doing well, but to have joy when things are falling apart is a gift of God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Joy isn't easy to describe. In the Old Testament there are 27 different words that are used for some aspect of joy. Suffice it to say, though, that joy is an attitude of mind that flows from peace and hope when our focus is on God and His faithfulness. Perhaps it could be said that joy is the outflow of a foundation of peace. So joy isn't dependent on circumstance. In fact, often it is negative circumstances that cause us to turn more closely to God and thus find joy in Him alone (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13). Always remember that joy is a gift of God's grace. It comes from His Spirit. In the Greek the word for joy and the word for grace come from the same root meaning "rejoice." This is not by chance. The "joy of the Lord" is not something we have naturally in our own strength and power; it comes by His grace.

So how does this apply? Well, if the roof is leaking and you can't get someone to fix it, move your chair! In other words, if things are tough and you're getting down under it all, change your attitude. Focus on God and His faithfulness and He will produce the fruit of joy in you by His Spirit. When we focus on Jesus' words only then does God promise that our joy will be full and complete (John 15:11). God knows that circumstances will not always make us happy (John 16:33) but that He will give joy despite it all (Psalm 30:5). Remember Peter and Silas in prison after being unfairly whipped. It's midnight in a dark, filthy dungeon and they are locked in stocks with their bodies screaming in pain. So what do they do? They sing! (Acts 16:22-25) That's what God's joy within is like - no matter what is happening in life God's joy is greater than any situation we may find ourselves in. But, like Peter when he walked on water but started to sink when he looked at the waves, we too must keep our eyes only on Jesus.

***James 1:2-4: Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

***“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:12-13***

***John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."***

***Psalms 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”***

***Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

***Nehemiah 8:10 Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."***

*Do you tend to look at circumstances around you and get discouraged? Is your glass half empty instead of half full? Take a moment to get your eyes on Jesus by writing down a list of times and ways in which He has been faithful to you. Trust Him to be so in your present situation.*

*Does your joy depend on how well your life and ministry are going, or do you depend on God to fill you with His joy each day?*

*Select one of the verses above to meditate on all day. Whenever circumstances start to get to you remember the verse. When God gives you His joy thank him for it.*

### **“I’VE GOT PEACE LIKE A RIVER”**

Peace – we often talk about it but don’t always understand it. Sometimes we think of it as calm circumstances, a time when there aren’t external difficulties or stresses. Thus peace is the absence of trouble. Perhaps that is why we so often try to control our environment and pray for God to remove anything that stretches us. But there is a big difference between everything going OK in life and real peace deep within. We seldom live with circumstances perfect, but we can always have peace within, no matter what storms rage without.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom’s basic meaning is wholeness and well-being in all areas of life. Real ‘shalom’ isn’t something that we can produce ourselves any more than we can whip up unconditional love or deep joy. It has to come from God’s Spirit. It is His fruit. It is an inner contentment, an attitude of faith in God despite what we face in life.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace because He alone brings peace. He isn’t called the Prince of Love or Hope, although He could have been. God blesses His people with peace (Psalm 29:11) because Jesus provided it on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-14).

The fruit of the Spirit is peace. Remember first, it’s FRUIT not fruits. Love is the blossom; peace is love trusting. God has placed His Spirit, His love within our lives. Therefore, while we may still live within a world in desperate need of peace, we trust God with absolute confidence for He is our peace.

Second, don’t forget it is the fruit of the SPIRIT, not the fruit of the saints. We cannot produce the fruit. This is spiritual fruit, and peace is only produced in our lives as we are connected to Jesus. He is the life giving vine by which we receive His Spirit in our lives. Jesus said, “Apart from me you

can do nothing,” but when we are connected to Him we will “bear much fruit.” (See: John 15:5). The first step to having peace in your life is to be connected to Jesus. Jesus went to the cross and died in your place. Jesus suffered torture and the most brutal of deaths to restore peace in your life. Therefore first we have peace WITH God (Romans 5:1), for the enmity is removed by the cross and He accepts us because Jesus paid for our sins. Then we have peace FROM God (Phil 4:7).

***Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,***

***John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***

***Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.***

***Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

*On a scale of 1 to 10, how much peace do you have in your life now? What is keeping it from being a 10? What do you need to do to make it a 10?*

*Is your first response to trouble to try and control circumstances or ask God for His peace? Where do you need peace in your life right now? Ask Him for it now.*

### **“LORD, GIVE ME PATIENCE AND GIVE IT TO ME NOW!”**

The annual cost of those who run red lights is over \$7 billion dollars. This includes medical bills, car repairs, etc. The average time saved by running a red light is less than 50 seconds. So why do so many do it? Impatience.

Patience is a fruit, a product of God’s Spirit. It isn’t part of the equipment we are born with. Have you ever met a patient newborn? No one has to learn how to be impatient. We are automatically made that way – it’s part of our self-centered sin nature.

A French proverb says, "Laziness is often mistaken for patience." Perhaps the opposite is also true, patience is often mistaken for laziness. A mother once chided her doctor, when her daughter was ill and she was worried. "Why don't you do something?" she asked. "I am doing something," replied the doctor. "I am waiting." Many of us have trouble determining when we are being patient and when we are being lazy.

We can define patience as bearing difficulties without complaint, trusting in a greater reason or purpose behind them. The Bible uses four different Greek words that are translated in various ways as patience. Each of these words emphasizes one aspect in one way or another of what we think of as patience. Paul said the fruit of the Spirit is “makrothymia.” This is a compound Greek word made up of the words “makro” meaning long, and “thymia” meaning anger. So literally it means LONG TO ANGER as opposed to “oxythymia” which means sudden anger. Longsuffering gives us the picture a person who in relation to those who annoy, oppose, or molest him, exercise patience. He refuses to yield to passion or to outbursts of anger.

What's so great about patience? Why does God want us to be patient? One reason is because He wants us to be like Him and He is patient (2 Peter 3:9). Another reason is because He knows it is best for us to patiently trust and wait.

Every fruit I know of has a protective outer layer. We peel a banana or orange to eat the fruit inside. Others fruit like an apple or grape we will eat skin and all. The outer layer serves an important purpose; it helps keep the moisture inside the fruit, even in dry seasons. The outer peel will also protect the fruit and allow it to grow. If the outer peel or skin is broken or removed, then the fruit will rot and spoil. Patience is like that for the soul of man. Patience protects our hearts from becoming rancid—bitter and rotten to the core. God wants our lives to be sweet and appealing to others; that's the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit to give our lives the aroma and taste of Jesus! The practical practice of patience restores and protects relationships. Godly patience enables us to show mercy instead of hate, to forgive instead of seek revenge. "Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down."

Patience is love enduring; it's love that lasts and won't be broken by anger. We are to be patient; with a long fuse we give allowances for each other's faults and shortcomings. It only comes from staying closely attached to Jesus, the vine (John 15:5). Then when trials come it means we place our faith in Him and default to His timing instead of taking things into our own hands (Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4).

Patience is not idleness; it doesn't mean you do nothing. Patience is active. The patient man is always ready to meet his neighbor halfway; instead of building fences, patience builds bridges to maintain relationships. Further, patience is not simply a character trait or quality an individual may possess. PATIENCE IS A LIFESTYLE! It is a way of life that affects all our relationships. Patience is an expression of love because love is patient. Patience, being slow to anger enables us to live a good life. Patience will keep us from embarrassing ourselves by what we say or do.

***Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.***

***Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

***Isaiah 40:31 They that WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.***

*Would those who know you best say you are a patient person? Why or why not?*

*What seems to make you most impatient? What can you do about that?*

*Ask God to show you any impatience you may have within you now, then confess it as sin and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and patience.*

## **CHRISTLIKE KINDNESS**

What do Pharaoh's daughter rescuing Moses, Rahab helping the Jewish spies, David's treatment of Mephibosheth and Elijah's response to the woman whose son just died have in common? They all were showing kindness.

Kindness can be defined as God's loyal love and favor toward His people. In the Old Testament, the word translated as "kindness" or "lovingkindness" refers to God's long-suffering love- His determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion (Deuteronomy 7:12; Hos 2:14-23). This attribute of God was shown through His divine mercy and forgiveness toward sinners when payment of sins through the sacrificial system was no longer effective (Deuteronomy 22:22; Ps 51:1).

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as "grace" best represents the idea of God's kindness or lovingkindness. Because God has been gracious toward believers, they should treat all people with kindness or grace (Luke 6:35). All people are created in God's image and should be treated accordingly, no matter how badly they have twisted and deformed that image (James 3:9). Kindness is not an apathetic response to sin, but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God (Hos 2:14-23; Rom 2:4).

God wants us to be kind to others because He is kind to us. Our kindness shows His kindness to others, and in doing so we become more like Him. Whenever we show love or compassion to others we are being kind. To an extent man can do that out of their old nature, but to show real kindness requires the presence and power of His Spirit for it means being kind to those who aren't deserving of it and may retaliate with hate. Turning the cheek in love can't be done without God's power.

How can we become more kind? First, we need to submit to the will of God (Philippians 2:1-8). If we can't submit to God's will we won't be able to submit to the needs of others. Then, we need a teachable spirit (James 1:21). We need to be open to instruction to make us more like Jesus. If we think we know it all already we will never grow more like Him. Finally, we need to have a consideration and love of others (Ephesians 4:1-2). We need to be able to put ourselves in other's shoes and be sensitive to their needs.

Kindness is love in operation so others can see Jesus in us. We deeply appreciate God's kindness to others. Others can experience His kindness through us.

***Proverbs 14:21 He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.***

***Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

***Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

***Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.***

*Who comes to mind when you think of people who are kind? What is there about them that makes them stand out from others? (Make a list of traits or characteristics.)*

*How do you measure up to the list you just make?*

*Pick 2 or 3 of the traits you lack and pray about them, asking God to produce them in your life. Then make a list of things you can do today to meet these.*

## **WHAT ARE YOU 'GOOD' FOR?**

One of the favorite New Testament stories for children is called the Good Samaritan. Everyone knows how the Samaritan responds to another in need. That is why he is called 'good.' But what exactly does 'good' mean? Other than the opposite of 'bad' how would we define good?

Goodness is defined as praiseworthy character; moral excellence. The Bible speaks often of the goodness of God (Ex 33:19; Rom 2:4). God's goodness consists of righteousness, holiness, justice, kindness, grace, mercy, and love. Goodness is also one of the fruits of the Spirit that should characterize Christian believers (Gal 5:22). Christians are called to goodness, even as God the Father is perfect and good (Matt 5:48). Goodness differs from the previous fruit, kindness, in that kindness is an outer action and goodness is the heart attitude that causes that action.

When used of God, 'goodness' sometimes is used as a summary of all His attributes (Exodus 33:19). Goodness is all God is. To the extent that we are 'good' we are like God. When we are lovable, virtuous and righteous we are like God.

Goodness cannot be separated from holiness. Holiness of life will always express itself in always of doing what is in the best interest of others. Moral Goodness is not optional, to keep the Commandments and God's Word must be a high priority. We must conform to all God's laws and principles. Holiness is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit, for it is part of goodness. When we are holy we are good, when we are good we are holy.

There is a difference between being good and doing good. Being good comes when God's Spirit indwells us at the moment of salvation. Doing good is the acting out of that inner goodness in everyday life. Being good is the holiness of Jesus that God gives us at salvation. Doing good is living a holy life in all we think, say and do. In essence, only God is good. But when He lives in us then we have His goodness, the fruit of His Spirit, which works through us.

The 'good' Samaritan is a fine example to all of us of what happens when God's goodness reigns in the heart. His love flows out of us to those around us. The good Samaritan wasn't unique – we can and should all be like Him when God's Spirit lives within.

***Ps 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.***

***Rom 15:14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.***

*What comes to mind when you think of holiness? Where would you say God's holiness is most evident in your life? Where do you need God's help to be more like Him?*

*Think of some ways you can show God's goodness to others through your actions today. What are they?*

*Ask God to fill you with His Spirit today and have Him manifest the fruit of goodness in your life.*

## **CAN GOD COUNT ON YOU?**

Semper Fidelis is Latin for "Always faithful." It is the motto of the City of Exeter in Devonshire, England, and is a testimony to the city's loyalty to the British Monarchy. Queen Elizabeth I wrote a letter to "The Citizens of Exeter" in 1588 suggesting they adapt this motto because of their faithfulness in supporting the British fleet that had defeated the Spanish Armada. It has also been the motto of the United States Marine Corps since 1883, and it is the title of the official March of the Marine Corps composed by John Phillips Sousa in 1888. Christian Disciples are called by the Holy Spirit to be "always faithful," and "Semper Fidelis" would be an excellent motto for us to adapt as well.

Just what does this word for 'faithfulness' mean? How can we define it? That is very easy for it is the same word as that used for 'faith.' Faithfulness is staying true to someone or something, being trustworthy, being someone who can be counted on. A faithful person is one whom can be trusted and depended on. Trustworthiness is the characteristic of the man who is reliable.

God is faithful (Psalm 119:138; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). Jesus is often called 'faithful' (Rev 1:5; 19:11). He is faithfulness personified. He is totally reliable, trustworthy and steadfast.

Faithfulness, life love, joy, peace and all the other fruit, is something that will be shown outwardly to others. It doesn't stay inside, it expresses itself visibly in our lives and actions. First of all, we are to be faithful to God. He has been faithful to us so why wouldn't we be faithful to Him? He should be able to depend on us.

Then, too, we are to be faithful to others. We are to be loyal and dependable to our families and friends, to our church and employers. The Golden Rule still applies – treat others the way you want to be treated. Do so and you will be showing faithfulness to them.

***1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man (woman) be found faithful.***

***2 Thessalonians 3:3 The Lord is faithful, who will establish us and protect us from evil.***

***Hebrews 13:5 "I Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

***2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.***

*How dependable are you? If you were God, would you trust yourself with important Kingdom work?*

*Do you have a reputation for being a loyal and faithful friend? To whom can you show that faithfulness today?*

*We grow in faithfulness by learning the Word of God (Roman 10:12) because the better we know God the more we will want to serve Him. Spend some time reading the Bible today.*

## **POWER UNDER CONTROL**

Do you remember that chant from childhood: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?" It isn't true. Everyone has sometimes been hurt by words. We are hurt by lying words. We are hurt by unkind words. We are hurt by angry words. Words can hurt us. That's why God wants His people to be gentle.

Gentleness is possibly the most misunderstood virtue. Many people think of gentleness as being weak, timid, or passive. This is not the biblical understanding of gentleness. The Greek language in which the NOT. was originally written, was a precise & expressive language. When the Greeks developed a word, they not only gave it a careful definition, but they almost always illustrated it. Their definition of gentleness was "power under control," & they illustrated it with the picture of a horse that had been tamed. Gentleness to them was a powerful animal with its power completely under control. Have you ever watched a 2000-pound horse pull logs? That big, strong Belgium horse was strength under control.

For example, water that's under control would be water rushing through a dam turning turbines, generating electricity to light a city. Water out of control would be a flood destroying everything in its path. A disease out of control can devastate the body & kill its victim. But a disease under control can produce vaccines & save thousands of lives. So when you think about gentleness, think about power under control, anger under control, our emotions under God's control.

The Life Application Bible states concerning gentleness: Gentleness—Humble, considerate of others, submissive to God and his Word. Even when anger is the appropriate response, as when

Jesus cleared the temple, gentleness keeps the expression of anger headed in the right direction. Gentleness applies even force in the correct way.

The fruit of kindness is showing love and compassion to others. Goodness is an inner spirit of love and holiness that show itself in doing that which benefits others. Gentleness, then, is tenderness but not weakness. It is power, but power under control. Examples would include Jesus' dealings with the woman at the well (John 4), the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and Zacchaeus the moneychanger (Luke 19).

DeSales once wrote, "Nothing is so strong as gentleness," and "Nothing is so gentle as real strength." When you are producing the fruit of the Spirit you will find you are strong enough to be gentle. What a perfect picture of Jesus. What a wonderful goal for us!

**1 Timothy 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions**

**1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,**

*Think of some times when others showed you gentleness. How did it feel? How were you affected?*

*Think of sometimes God has been gentle with you. Thank Him for it.*

*Who can you show gentleness towards today?*

## **SPIRIT-CONTROL: DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT**

A young girl was learning the fruits of the Spirit, so her father asked her to recite them to him. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and remote control," was her reply. That's not exactly right, but it is much closer to the truth than we may realize. You see, 'self' control doesn't mean that self is IN control. It means that self is UNDER control – under the control of the Holy Spirit.

We are born without self-control. Babies can't control their muscles to walk or to feed themselves, they can't control their bowels and they certainly can't control their emotions. Control needs to be learned – physically, emotionally and even spiritually. This fruit really should be called SPIRIT control, not self-control.

So what does Spirit control really look like? It is the ability to rule your personal life so that you are not dominated by sin (Romans 6:12). It is the ability to control your self-life from within by spiritual means (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

For the Christian self-control is a spiritual grace. In the secular world we often associate self-control with willpower. Self-control or willpower would embrace such things as dieting, quitting smoking, exercise, gambling, alcohol, work habits, ethics, and living within your means. These are only just a few; each of you can add many others to this list. In our Christian walk nothing is ever accomplished by our own personal works, efforts, or merit. The entire Christian life is a walk of grace in total surrender and dependency upon the Holy Spirit. It comes by grace through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not by any personal effort on my part other than total surrender and obedience to Him. Christian self-control always honors Jesus, not myself.

Remember, self-control (really Spirit control) starts within, not without. It is not just controlling our actions, for it starts with controlling our thoughts. What is in our heart comes out through our

mouth. Spirit control doesn't just help us keep our mouth shut, it shows us how to have a proper attitude in our heart.

Imagine if you started your car and noticed white smoke coming out the tailpipe. You wouldn't get a new tailpipe because that isn't the problem. The tailpipe only reveals the problem. Rather, you would do some engine work. In the same way, your habits only reveal what goes on in your heart.

If you have a habit of gossiping, the problem isn't gossip; the problem is malice or envy. If you have a habit of blowing up, the problem isn't your temper; the problem is rage, hatred, and bitterness in your heart. If you have a problem with pornography or infidelity to your spouse, the problem is lust in your heart. The base sin in all these is pride which is idolatry. Any time something is put before God it is idolatry, and idolatry begins in the heart.

Everyone needs the fruit of self-control. Paul needed it as well (Romans 7:19-21). Victory came when He let the Spirit control him (Romans 8 follows Romans 7). And we need it daily, even hourly (2 Corinthians 4:16). It isn't just for the 'big' things in life but for everyday things like our actions and speech (James 1:26). Spirit control – don't leave home without it.

***1 Cor. 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is self-controlled in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. . Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. . But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. II Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."***

*Think of some areas in life where you need God's Spirit control. Pray specifically for each area and the control you need in it. Remember to pray throughout the day as these issues arise in life.*

## **INCREASING OUR FRUIT PRODUCTION**

How does a branch bear fruit? By trying its best and working hard? By doing its very best? No, a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. If you see a branch lying by the side of the road and bring it home will you see fruit form, grow and ripen on it? Never! A branch only bears fruit when it is attached to the vine. Actually, the vine produces the fruit, the branch just displays it. It manifests itself on the branch, but is produced within the vine itself. The roots and trunk supply the branch with what it needs to produce fruit.

That was common knowledge to anyone in Jesus' day, so that is the analogy Jesus used when explaining to His disciples that they needed Him to produce fruit. It was late Thursday night, April 2, 33 AD, a few hours before the crucifixion. Jesus knew His time with His disciples was almost at an end so He wanted His last teaching opportunity to really count. So He uses this final opportunity to again make sure they knew the importance of staying in close contact with Him in order to produce spiritual fruit for the Kingdom.

The meaning is clear: Jesus' branches (disciples) need to stay in close contact with Him in order for Him to produce fruit through them. We can't do anything on our own, only through Him. Salvation is all by Him, so is the fruit we produce as we live for Him. A branch not in direct contact with the vine is useless. It can be a mile from the vine or a thousandth of a Millimeter. The distance

doesn't matter. Any removal at all, no matter how small, and the sap doesn't flow so fruit isn't produced. Without God's Spirit freely flowing in us we won't be able to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

How can we tell if we are in direct contact or not? That's easy. When we spend time in prayer and Bible study, worship and service, and when we make sure all our sins are confessed and under the blood, then we are assured we are filled with His Spirit. We will then find we have an unconditional love for God, family, self and others. We will have a joy despite circumstances and be at peace with God and others no matter what is going on around us. We will be patient in trials and our thoughts and actions will be characterized by kindness, goodness and gentleness. Our faith in God will grow and so will our loyalty and devotion to Him. We will have Spirit-control in all areas of life. In effect, we will be growing in spiritual maturity. He does all the work – we just stay close and allow Him to work in us. That certainly isn't hard, is it. It's all available if we allow Him to do it.

***John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***

*Of these 9 fruit of the Holy Spirit, which do you need most in your life? Why?*

*Write them down and pray every morning that God would fill you with His Spirit and produce these fruit in you. When a need arises during the day pause and ask for His fruit to be manifest at that time.*

## **f. SECURITY OF SALVATION**

### **CAN YOU LOSE YOUR SALVATION? 1**

One of the first subjects I researched when I went to Bible college was if salvation could be lost or not. It's a topic I've continued to study in the years since. I wasn't motivated so much by anxiety of losing my salvation as I was concerned about how the subject of "once saved always saved" played out in life. I saw too many Christians who came from theological traditions that taught that salvation could be lost living in fear and turning to legalism to find security. They lived good, holy lives – but often motivated by doing all they could to not lose salvation. Thus, their Christian life was self-centered, not Jesus-centered. They would turn to emphasizing certain spiritual gifts to prove to themselves and others they had God's favor. It was like a wife treating her husband well because she was afraid he'd divorce her instead of loving him for himself. Or like God providing an ark for Noah and his family to escape the world-wide flood but then expecting them to hang on to the outside of the boat the whole time. This is more than a theological issue. It strikes right at the heart of why we do what we do for Jesus. What does the Bible have to say about this?

**BIBLE PASSAGES THAT PROVE SECURITY OF SALVATION.** The Bible makes it clear God's people are secure in Him, no conditions given.

*"It is a trustworthy statement: ... If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).* Keeping salvation isn't dependent on our faithfulness to our promise but on God's faithfulness to His.

*"A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out" (Matthew 12:20 quoting Psalm 37:24).* Shepherds played music on a reed of straw pulled from the marshes until it broke and was useless, then threw it away and cut another. God, through Isaiah, reminded the Jews He would be faithful to them even though they were unfaithful to Him. God's faithfulness to us is not conditioned on our faithfulness to Him. He left heaven to come to earth, not because of our faithfulness to Him, but because of His faithfulness to us.

*"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Psalm 37:24).* When Peter lost faith walking on the water, Jesus did not let him drown but rescued him. Peter lost hold of Jesus but Jesus never lost hold of him.

*"Christ, who has begun a good work in you, will carry it on to completion as the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).* There are no "ifs" or conditions to that promise.

*"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account" Romans 4:1-12, esp v.8, quoting Psalm 32:2).* David's sin with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband certainly would have cost him his salvation if such a thing were possible. David should have been stoned to death for adultery and murder. But David's testimony is that God did not take His salvation or hold His sin against him for all eternity.

*"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-9).* Nothing can separate a believer from God. Not Satan or demons. Not any event on earth. Not even man's free will giving back salvation.

*"I give to them (Christians) eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand" (John 10:28-9).* This verses shows security of salvation in many ways. 1. Christ our Shepherd is responsible to care for us and get us to heaven. That He'd fail a sheep is blasphemy. 2. Sheep are too dumb to take care of themselves. The shepherd never expected them to be responsible for their own safety. 3. "Eternal" life is already a current possession. We don't wait until we die to see if we have it. We NOW possess eternal life. 4. God "gave" the sheep to Jesus who received them (us) unconditionally. 5. Jesus says we will "Never" perish. He doesn't lie. "Never" is the strongest possible negative in Greek. 6. We are secure in Jesus's hand for no outside force can open it against His will, not even us. 7. In addition, Jesus' hand has God's hand wrapped around it for extra protection and assurance. Nothing can end our salvation, not even us.

**GREEK LANGUAGE PROVES SECURITY OF SALVATION.** God chose to record the New Testament in the Greek language because it is very precise and scientific in its meaning. It is not open to various interpretations.

*"He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47).* "Believe" is in a tense describing a one-time event in the past whose results continue forever. It does make salvation conditional on continuing to believe because sometimes our faith gets challenged and falters. Still, salvation is secure.

*"Believe and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9).* "Believe" is the same as John 6:47 above. "Be saved" is in a tense that states future certainty. Also, it is in the passive voice which means the one believing freely receives it without doing anything to earn or deserve it. Faith is not a meritorious work needed for salvation. Therefore, losing faith will not remove salvation.

*"Have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8-9).* This, too, is a one-time event in the past with results that continue forever and is in the passive voice so we only receive it and do not meet any qualification for salvation. Therefore, there is no qualification to break.

*"Will never perish" (John 10:28-29).* This is the strongest Greek negative, meaning it can't possibly happen under any circumstances no matter what.

One of Satan's most dangerous lies is that we have lost our salvation. When we believe that we lose our peace and joy. We begin living by law and not grace. It's a very sad way to live when God says He has an abundant life for us (John 10:10). (Continued in a future blog.)

*Do you struggle with the fear of losing your salvation?*

*Which of the proofs given in the blog are strong proofs to you that salvation cannot be lost?*

## **CAN YOU LOSE YOUR SALVATION? 2**

A few weeks ago we looked at proofs showing that salvation cannot be lost. We looked at Bible passages that assure us of this and how Greek language supports this as well. Let's look at some more proof of eternal security.

**ALL INVOLVED IN SALVATION PROVES IT IS SECURE.** Everything in salvation is by God. Man doesn't do anything to earn or deserve it so there is nothing he can do to lose it. To receive salvation we simply stop rejecting the free gift God makes available.

Some have counted up to 210 things that happen at the moment of salvation. The Bible says we are: Reconciled, Redeemed, Forgiven, Seated with Jesus, a Son of God, Born Again, Regenerated, Adopted, Accepted, Righteous, Justified, Sanctified, Free From Satan's Control, A Holy Priesthood, Given Access to God, A Citizen of Heaven, Baptized, Sealed and Indwelt by the Holy Spirit and many more. Why would we be given all that now if there was a chance of losing it? Why not wait until we really had salvation, which then wouldn't be until death.

Sin, disobedience, unfaithfulness and disbelief in a believer's life result in lost opportunities for eternal reward, but not lost salvation.

When we sin, we are told to "confess" the sin (1 John 1:9). Nowhere are we told to be "resaved."

God disciplines believers in sin, but they are still believers and still called His children (Hebrews 12:6-11; Proverbs 3:11-12).

All Christians are part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). A body doesn't just lose parts and then get the back again. Body parts are created to be permanent.

The Bible states that all Christians are free from the power of sin (Romans 6:14) even though we aren't free from the presence of sin. Sin no longer has dominion or mastery over us.

God foreknew, elected, predestined, chose and called us (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-5). Yes, we have a free will, but the Bible makes it clear that without God working in us we wouldn't come to Him. He gets the credit, not us. If we couldn't bring ourselves to Him without His assistance, how can He expect us to keep ourselves with Him?

Many times the Bible says we are "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1; Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 1:3-4) and "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:26-27). We are part of Him as members of His Body and part of His Bride. These are permanent positions, not conditional possibilities dependent on our faithfulness and perseverance.

We are told to not grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) or quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) by sin. The Bible says our sin impacts our openness to the Spirit working in us, not that the Spirit leaves and we need to start over again.

**OLD & NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES.** All the pictures and illustrations of salvation in the Bible show it is secure.

Noah built an ark for protection from judgment and covered it with “pitch” (the Hebrew word for “atonement”). God shut the door and secured them safely inside. It wasn’t something they had to shut and then hold it shut. Afterwards Noah got drunk and sinned but was still a believer (Hebrews 11:7).

Jews bitten by a snake in the wilderness had only to look at the snake lifted up (a picture of Jesus) to have the poison removed (John 3:14-15). It never came back, even after they stopped looking.

Lot had sin in his life. He even impregnated his own daughters (Genesis 19:1-38). Yet he is referred to as “righteous Lot” in 2 Peter 2:7-8. Samson was a terrible failure in life but is listed in the role of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:34. They were clearly carnal believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). If salvation could be lost, then those who are carnal would have lost their salvation but they are still believers, just living by the flesh instead of the Spirit. Others who are labeled as part of the Body of Christ but are in sin are in Rome (Romans 7:14; 12:1; 2:16), Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; etc.), and other churches. Paul told churches to correct sinning believers or God would, but they were still believers. Even Annias and Saphira (Acts 5), who were seen by Peter and the church as believers in Jesus, were disciplined for their sin but there is no mention or warning of them losing their salvation.

The New Testament refers to salvation as being “born again,” “adoption” and “sonship.” Those things can’t be undone. One can’t be unborn or born out of their family. Sonship can be denied but not undone. Adoption is not conditioned on the one being adopted doing anything to keep their adoption.

Salvation is a gift freely given (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is nothing required but receiving it and no condition whereby the giver would take it back. If it is a free gift, there is nothing that can be done to reject it unless the giver wants it back and God doesn’t (John 10; Romans 8).

The prodigal son rejected the father but was still a son and the father never rejected him (Luke 15:11-32) but accepted him back. He was always his father’s son even though the closeness was broken.

Peter denied Jesus 3 times (Matthew 26:69–75) but Jesus forgave and reinstated him (John 21:15-23). He didn’t have to be “resaved” or born again a second time. Fellowship was broken but the relationship remained.

Individual Greek words and Bible verses, as well as descriptions of salvation and the overall teaching of what salvation entails all combine to show conclusively that salvation is secure eternally. Those who oppose “once saved always saved” point out that it can be used as an excuse to sin after salvation, to take advantage of God’s grace and forgiveness. That is true, but God is a God of grace. Salvation is freely given, received and lived out by grace. We are not under law and are not to put ourselves under law, which is what happens when we try to keep our salvation by our deeds. Replacing grace with a system of do’s and don’ts places the emphasis on us and our works. Fear replaces love as a motivating force. We are free in Christ. Following Jesus to keep from losing salvation is not living in liberty but in bondage (Galatians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Romans 8:1-2, and John 8:36).

*Do you ever fear you have lost your salvation?*

*Which of the proofs given in the blog are strong proofs to you that salvation cannot be lost?*

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