

What The Spirit Does

Introduction. Perhaps one of the most confusing aspects of the Godhead today is the work of the Holy Spirit. If someone has ever asked you about the work of the Holy Spirit, you may have been able to barely stammer out an answer. If you have, you can take heart because many Christians cannot rightly answer these questions.

We can understand the Spirit's work in God's redemptive plan. Hopefully this study of how the Holy Spirit works in conviction, conversion, and sanctification will assist you in helping those who are deceived see the truth about the Holy Spirit's work.

I. Conviction, Conversion, And Sanctification In Modern Thought

- A. John Piper provides a good illustration of what Calvinists believe on conviction and conversion.
 - 1. "Since men are blinded to the worth of Christ, a miracle is needed in order for them to come to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, 'Let there be light.' It is in fact a new creation, or a new birth. This is what is meant by the effectual call in 1 Corinthians 1:24."
 - 2. "Those who are called have their eyes opened by the sovereign creative power of God so that they no longer see the cross as foolishness but as the power and the wisdom of God. The effectual call is the miracle of having our blindness removed. This is irresistible grace."
- B. N. L. Rice, in a debate with Alexander Campbell, further illustrates Calvinist thought on conviction and conversion.
 - 1. "In conversion and sanctification there is an influence of the Spirit in addition to that of the Word, and distinct from it — an influence, without which the arguments and motives of the gospel would never convert and sanctify one of Adam's ruined race."
 - 2. "Why, then, it will be asked, is it necessary that there should be an influence of the Spirit, in addition to that of the word, and distinct from it? The necessity arises simply from the depravity of the human heart."
- C. Defining sanctification.
 - 1. Sanctification, or in its verbal form, sanctify, literally means "to set apart" for special use or purpose, that is, to make holy or sacred. Therefore, sanctification refers to the state or process of being set apart, i.e. made holy.
 - a) Biblically speaking we are sanctified when we obey Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11), but it is also an ongoing process (2 Corinthians 7:1).
 - b) In common speech it is used to refer most often to the Christian's daily walk as he seeks to become more holy and closer to God.
 - 2. Many have taken this to mean that the Spirit helps us in our daily walk in a non-revelatory way.
 - a) J. I. Packer said, "It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the Biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers ... As by inspiration he provided Scripture truth for us, so now by illumination he interprets it to us. Illumination is thus the applying of God's

revealed truth to our hearts, so that we grasp as reality for ourselves what the sacred text sets forth.”

- b) Francis Chan said, “Scripture tells us that the Spirit not only inspired the Bible, but also illumines it for us today (1 Corinthians 2:12-16 and 2 Timothy 3:16) ... God wants us to listen to His Spirit on a daily basis, and even throughout the day, as difficult and stretching moments arise, and in the midst of the mundane. My hope is that instead of searching for ‘God’s will for my life,’ each of us would learn to seek hard after ‘the Spirit’s leading in my life today.’ May we learn to pray for an open and willing heart, to surrender to the Spirit’s leading with that friend, child, spouse, circumstance, or decision in our lives right now.”
- c) Unfortunately, some Christians now believe that God directly communicates outside of His revelation of scripture.

II. Biblical Conviction And Conversion

- A. How does the Holy Spirit convict and convert?
 - 1. Jesus promised His apostles that the Spirit would be sent for this purpose (John 16:7-13).
 - 2. The remainder of the New Testament shows that this was done by the preaching of the gospel.
 - a) Sin (Romans 1:18-3:23; Acts 2:37).
 - b) Righteousness (Romans 1:17; Acts 24:25).
 - c) Judgment (Acts 17:30-31; 24:25).
- B. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit revealed the faith-producing gospel to the apostles and prophets (Romans 10:14-17; cp. Luke 8:12). This gospel saves (Romans 1:16; James 1:18, 21; 1 Peter 1:22-23). Although miraculous elements were sometimes present, the conversions always came by preaching.
 - 2. The one time Holy Spirit baptism took place with ones not yet Christians, the purpose was not to open their eyes, but to open the eyes of some who were already Christians (Acts 10:44-48; 11:13-18).
 - 3. Paul was told that his preaching would open eyes and lead men to repentance (Acts 26:15-20). When we read of Lydia’s heart being opened, why assume it was anything other than what Jesus said (Acts 16:13-15)?

III. The Holy Spirit And The Word

- A. In both conversion and sanctification, the apostles expected sinners to be able to use their reasoning ability to understand (Ephesians 3:3-5; cp. Acts 17:2; 24:25).
- B. To speak highly of the word is to honor the Spirit, not forget Him.
 - 1. God testified by His Spirit in the prophets (Nehemiah 9:30). To resist the Spirit is to reject the messengers of God (Acts 7:51-53).
 - 2. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17), and He witnesses to us through His words (Hebrews 10:15-17).
 - 3. In several places, the Holy Spirit and the word are said to accomplish or be responsible for the same operations or outcomes.

- a) The new birth is attributed to the word and the Spirit (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:22-23). The washing of water by the word corresponds to the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5).
- b) Being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19) is equated with allowing the word of Christ to dwell richly in one (Colossians 3:16).
- c) Ephesians 3:16's strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man seems to correspond to the prayer in Colossians 1:9-11 that they be filled with the knowledge of His will and strengthened with all might.

IV. The Completeness Of God's Guidance

- A. The scriptures are sufficient as God's final revelation.
 - 1. The various ways God once spoke are contrasted with the message spoken through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:1-4).
 - 2. Truth was once for all delivered (Jude 3) and accomplishes every good work within us (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - 3. In John 16:12-13, the completeness of truth was promised to a group of men living in the first century.
 - a) All truth had to be revealed before those men died.
 - b) John urged readers to stay with what they had heard (1 John 2:24).
- B. Mystical experiences.
 - 1. When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, he did not encourage him to focus on new revelations, impressions, feelings, or hunches. He continually turned him to the word of God and its doctrines (2 Timothy 2:2; 3:15-17; 4:2-4).
 - 2. While never denying the authority of scripture as such, many Christians regularly point to mystical experiences as the basis of much of what they do and believe. Their references to knowing God's will through perceived answers to prayers, "providential nudges," hunches, and the like reveal that they are not quite satisfied with the written word.
 - 3. To believe in direct messages, illumination, or divine nudges presents many real dangers.
 - a) Truth becomes very subjective and opens us up to deception.
 - (1) The heart can be deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Truth is no longer determined by abiding in His word (John 8:31-32). In fact, one can never be certain about anything that has been biblically revealed.
 - (2) We become very susceptible to lying wonders and deceiving spirits (1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).
 - (3) Those claiming they are guided by the Spirit teach and practice contradictory doctrines, i.e. Pentecostals, Catholics, and Mormons.
 - b) Belief in direct guidance leads to arrogance and resistance toward any who try to correct us (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Conclusion. The work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation is misunderstood on so many different fronts that we could devote several lessons to this. My hope is that we will not make the Holy Spirit the forgotten God, but will honor Him and His work as we preach the word of God as all-sufficient in conviction, conversion, and sanctification.