

Holy Spirit - Holy Bible¹

(1 Corinthians 2:11-16)

Last week we looked at Paul's teaching concerning the wisdom of God. As we studied the passage at the beginning of chapter 2 we saw that God's wisdom enlightens us because it is both eternal and external from ourselves. This week I want to explain that the Holy Bible is the collection of writings where the wisdom of God finds its full expression because these sixty-six books are shaped by the Holy Spirit's direct influence and guidance.

The theme of how the Holy Spirit has influenced the Bible is at the heart of what Paul teaches in verses 10-16 of chapter 2. In this passage we learn four things about who the Holy Spirit is and how he has worked in shaping the Bible. Paul teaches that he is the:

- searching spirit,
- the revealing spirit,
- the inspiring spirit,
- and the enlightening spirit.

The Searching Spirit:

At verse 10:b Paul writes "for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God."

You will notice first off that the Holy Spirit is personal. He has a mind with which he can think. The Holy Spirit uses this mind to search and comprehend what is truly God's. You will observe that Paul uses two pictures to describe the way the Holy Spirit is involved in the work of revelation. He searches the depths of God and knows

¹I am thankful to the Reverend Doctor John Stott. Much of the material in this sermon is quoted from Dr. Stott's book Basic Christian Leadership: Pages 62-71

the thoughts of God.

This verb "searches" is one that we can better understand when we know that the same verb is found a third century papyrus describing custom officials. It speaks of them searching through traveler's baggage. Just as the custom's officials search diligently through a travelers baggage Paul says that the Holy Spirit searches the depths of God.

To change the image, the Holy Spirit is depicted as a restlessly inquisitive researcher, even a deep-sea diver seeking to fathom the most hidden parts of God's being. The Holy Spirit is God exploring the infinity of God not for God's own sake but for our sake. How privileged we are to have the work of the searching Spirit so readily available to us so that we can know the thoughts of God. Paul then draws a parallel by saying that just as it is only human beings that understand what it is to be human so too with God. Nobody can understand God except God himself.

God, by His Spirit, has communicated this understanding so as to make it known to us what has been discovered. Thus the searching Spirit becomes the revealing Spirit.

The Revealing Spirit:

The Holy Spirit's work of revelation has already been stated in verse 10 where Paul says "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit". The things Paul is referring to are the deep things of God. It is important to understand that the deep things of God are contained in the 66 books of the Bible compiled over 2000 or more years. Those who received the revelation contained in the Bible have a unique place in the history of God's saving work. This is because the Holy Spirit revealed to them in a particular way the deep things of God. You will notice that the phrase "these things God revealed to us through the Spirit" is elaborated on in verse 12 where Paul writes "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God."

What are the gifts Paul is referring to here? They are separate but related. First they had received God's salvation, that is what God has freely given us. Second they had received God's Spirit to enable them to understand the salvation he had freely given them.

The apostle Paul is perhaps the best example of this double divine gift. The gift of

salvation and the gift of the Spirit. Paul's letters teach us so thoroughly the gospel of grace. Paul's moving exposition stretches the mind and fires the heart. But how did he understand all this? How could he make such a comprehensive statement of salvation? The first answer is that he had himself received this salvation, while the second is he had received the Holy Spirit to interpret his experience to him. Thus the searching spirit became the revealing Spirit, making his work of salvation known to the biblical authors.

The Inspiring Spirit:

If verse 12 refers to what the Apostles received, verse 13 tells us that they imparted this to others. "And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual." Thus the searching Spirit, who had revealed God's plan of salvation to the apostles, went on to communicate it through them to others.

There is an unambiguous claim on the part of the apostle Paul to "verbal inspiration." that is, the very words in which the apostles expressed their message had been given to them by the Holy Spirit.

What do I mean by this phrase verbal inspiration. This means that what the Holy Spirit spoke through the biblical authors understood according to its literary genre, its plain natural meaning and the intention of each author and each context is true and without error. There is no need to be embarrassed by, or afraid of, this traditional Christian belief. It is eminently reasonable because words are the building-blocks of sentences and so of speech. Words matter! Some theologians argue that what is inspired is the sense and not the words. But this is an unhelpful distinction because the sense depends on the words. It is impossible to convey a precise message without choosing precise words.

This then is the apostolic claim. The same Holy Spirit of God, who searches the depths of God and knows the thoughts of God, and who revealed his findings to the Apostles went on to communicate them to others through the apostles words which he gave them. He spoke his words through their words, so that their words were simultaneously his. This is the double authorship of the Scripture and the meaning of inspiration.

The Enlightening Spirit:

We have seen thus far that Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as the searching, revealing and inspiring Spirit. In verses 13-16 he describes him as the enlightening Spirit.

How are we to think of those who received the apostles' letters and listened to them being read? Were they left to themselves to understand what was written? No, not at all. The same Holy Spirit who was active in the apostles who wrote the letters was also active in those who received and read them. The Holy Spirit was at work at both ends of the communication process - inspiring the apostles and enlightening their hearers and readers. When Paul says at the end of verse 13 "interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual" he is saying that the Holy Spirit interprets spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit

It would be helpful for us to distinguish between some words we have been using this morning. Revelation and inspiration describe the unique, objective process by which the Holy Spirit taught the biblical authors. Illumination, however describes the Holy Spirit's subjective work of enlightening our minds to grasp what they wrote. Let me use this example. Suppose you were to bring a blindfolded friend to an unveiling ceremony. Two actions would be necessary before your friend could read the words on the plaque. First, the plaque would have to be unveiled (which is revelation). Second your friend's blindfold would need to be removed (which is illumination). Verses 14 and 15 elaborate on this truth "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny."

What Paul is saying here is the following. The plaque containing God's wisdom has already been unveiled and finds its fullest expression in the Bible. However to many people the revelation remains hidden to them not because God hides it. No, it remains hidden because they are, so to speak, still wearing the blindfold. Because their minds are closed to Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit cannot enlighten their understanding. However the person who has the Spirit is able to discern all things. This does not mean he or she is somehow omniscient or infallible, but things to which they were spiritually blind now at last begin to make sense to them. He or she understands what had not been understood before. However Paul says that although he or she now has understanding they will not be understood by those who still remain blindfolded.

That the spiritual person is not understood by the unspiritual person is not surprising because nobody can know the mind of the Lord unless they are being influenced by the Spirit. And since the unspiritual person cannot understand Christ's mind, they cannot understand ours either because we have the mind of Christ.

When people come to an experience of the Spirit as Paul describes this in verses 15-16 then we can see the Bible and read it in the way Max Lucado describes this encounter with God's wisdom:

We go to the Word of God for comfort, and when we do, the words pierce like a surgeon's scalpel, both cutting and healing. The Word of God cuts to the very place where thoughts and attitudes come together, at the juncture of soul and spirit, providing a healing that can be obtained in no other way on earth.

The Bible was provided for us as a vehicle to carry us so that we might be able to see Jesus Christ.

If you want to grow in the Word of God, become a person with a chisel and quarry the Word - look, explore, seek. Let the Word become your Word, and you will grow.

God's wisdom has been made known to us by the Holy Spirit who searches, reveals, inspires and enlightens the Word so that we can with humility, gratitude and assurance say with Paul, we have the mind of Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, we're amazed at how practical your Bible is. Who would have thought that daily help could be found in a book so old. Every time we open it we find it's not old at all. Help us to look for your guidance in that precious book. Make us aware of how precious your Word is. Thank you Father for giving us this source of light and strength, and for giving us the opportunity to uncover the jewels waiting to be discovered in your holy pages. Amen