

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD

Part One
by Ted J. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

One of the most dangerous false doctrines that has circulated among religious groups professing Christianity, including some in the Lord's church, is the idea that there is a **direct** operation of the Holy Spirit upon man's spirit in order to cause him to be saved, followed by a continuing direct operation on the spirit of a Christian to enable one to live a faithful life. Those who teach this error are likely to honestly believe that the Bible presents such to be the work of the Holy Spirit, but we think the Scriptures teach otherwise.

When we say a **direct operation of the Holy Spirit** upon the human spirit, we refer to the idea that God's Spirit comes in direct contact with one's human spirit, the result being that the human spirit is brought to act in a manner that it would not have otherwise done. An example of this can be seen in the Calvinistic concept of how one is saved from sin. Calvinism teaches that all mankind is so totally depraved in mind that no person can simply hear the gospel of Christ preached or read it from the Bible and respond to the gospel in a saving obedient faith. See the Westminster or Philadelphia Confessions of Faith. Accordingly, denominations that embrace this teaching say that an unbelieving person must have the Holy Spirit of God act directly upon the human spirit to enable one to believe and obey the gospel. However, the Bible

no where teaches this type of activity by the Holy Spirit in order for people to be saved. The apostle Paul said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:16-17). There is not even a hint of any direct action of the Spirit upon the human spirit in this or any other New Testament (NT) passage. We will show that the Holy Spirit is active in every instance of one becoming a Christian, but that He operates **indirectly** through the means of God's Word to influence a person's spirit to believe and obey the gospel.

Some likewise teach the need of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart (spirit) of a Christian to enable him or her to resist temptation, obey God's commands and understand what the Scriptures teach. This too is a teaching of Calvinism, although there are some teaching this doctrine who do not believe that the Holy Spirit must act directly upon an unbeliever to enable one to believe and obey. The claim is that God has promised the Christian a direct empowerment from the Holy Spirit that is not available to the non-Christian. Again, there is no question that the Spirit of God teaches, leads, and strengthens Christians to live the victorious life. The question is **how**

does the Spirit do this? By directly acting upon the human spirit and forcing knowledge, guidance and power upon each individual; or by using the means of God's Word to instruct, motivate and persuade? We believe the latter. Keep these verses in mind throughout this study: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly [completely, American Standard Version] furnished unto all good works”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If the inspired Scripture furnishes us “completely unto all good works,” what is lacking that we need a direct influence of God's Holy Spirit to complete? Can one be more complete than complete?

The Holy Spirit is not the Word of God, but the Word is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to wield His influence upon the hearts of men. *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6:17). Suppose a man wishes to cut down a tree. He goes to the woods carrying an axe or a saw. The man is not the axe or the saw, but those are instruments he may use to accomplish his purpose. The Holy Spirit desires to influence the heart of every unbeliever to believe and obey the gospel, and He desires equally to influence the heart of every Christian to be faithful. If He exercises this influence through the Word of God it is still the Spirit working to accomplish these goals. He is simply doing this through a means or instrument, as the woodsman cutting down a tree uses his saw or axe. The instrument of the Spirit, His sword to cut into the heart of man and procure

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his obedience, is the Word of God. *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). *“For the word of God is quick [living, ASV], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). This is the power of the Spirit working through the “word of God.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES CHRISTIANS

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I*

will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:7-15).

These are promises Jesus made to His apostles, assuring them that the Spirit would reveal His complete will to them and inspire them to teach this truth without error. These are not general promises to all Christians, but words of comfort and promise to the apostles of Christ because He would soon be leaving them (John 14:16-20). Actually, John, chapters 13-17, is a section of Scripture spoken by Christ to His apostles on the night of His betrayal when they observed the Passover and Last Supper. There are a few general statements of Christ in this section, but the passages quoted above are not promises to all men.

The fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit's coming to the apostles (repeated again in Acts 1:5, 8) occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-47. You will notice from a reading of this chapter that the Holy Spirit fell directly upon the apostles, empowering them to speak in languages they had not studied and inspiring them to preach the gospel of Christ for the first time. There was no direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts (spirits) of those who heard the gospel preached. Peter did not tell them to “pray through,”

asking for a direct operation of the Spirit of God to enable them to believe. Peter told the audience: *“hearken to my words”* (Acts 2:14); *“hear these words”* (verse 22), indicating that they had the ability to understand and act upon what he preached. Peter told them Jesus had been made *“Lord and Christ”* (verse 36), and they obviously believed him, for verse 37 says, *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* They were *“pricked in their heart”* when they *“heard”* the Holy Spirit's inspired Word in the mouth of Peter, not by a direct operation of the Spirit upon them. They believed because they understood God's Word, not because the Spirit directly made them believe. They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and then they would receive a promised gift of the Spirit (verse 38). [More on this gift of the Spirit later.] Verses 40-41 continue to show the power of God's Word on the hearts of honest hearers. *“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”* Did the Spirit *“convict”* these men of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). Indeed! How did He do His work? Through the Word of God preached by the Spirit inspired apostles.

Acts 2 is the pattern for all subsequent conversions to the gospel. While it is true in Acts 10 that the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his family directly from heaven, the Spirit **did not** come upon them in order to make them believe or to save them. The Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and family to convince the Jewish Christians that God was accepting Gentiles into the Lord's church. Carefully read Acts 10:43-

48; 11:15-18 where this is stated. Cornelius was told to send for Peter for “*he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*” (10:6); “*to hear words of thee*” (10:22); “*we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*” (10:33); “*who [Peter] shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (11:14). The Holy Spirit influenced Cornelius and his family through the Word of God preached by Peter. That is the same means used throughout this Christian age to win men’s hearts to Jesus.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAN’S FREE MORAL AGENCY

The free moral agency of man simply means that God created us with a free will, that we can make moral choices to believe and obey God or to disbelieve and disobey Him. In the Garden of Eden God sought to influence Adam and Eve to do right through His spoken words with the promise of rewards and fear of punishment (Genesis 2:15-17). He did not place his Holy Spirit directly upon the spirit of man to force man to do right. Genesis 3 shows us that Adam and Eve could have obeyed God, but they chose to be swayed by the words of Satan rather than the Word of God. Satan’s influence was not his evil spirit directly upon Adam and Eve, just as God’s influence was not direct, but he influenced them through words to motivate and persuade. When they gave in to Satan’s temptation and failed to do what God told them to do, God held them accountable. If they could not have done what God commanded and obeyed Him rather than disobeyed Him, God would not have punished them as He did. God is a just and righteous God. “*Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments*” (Psalm 119:137).

God wants our obedience, praise and service to Him to come from our

free will to choose to adore Him over all other options. God does not want robots that have no free will to honor Him. What glory is there in that? He does not require the impossible nor does He do for us what He has equipped us to be able to do—hear, believe and obey.

To bring about our salvation from sin God did something for us we could not do ourselves, but this did not affect our free will. He gave His only begotten Son as the perfect sacrifice for sins (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-9). This loving act by God and Christ appeals to our emotion, intellect and will and begs us to trust and obey. The Calvinistic ideas that man cannot believe God’s Word without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart actually puts the blame on God and His Holy Spirit if any are not saved. If the ability to believe the gospel requires a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon man’s heart and the Spirit does not enable that individual to believe, whose fault would that be? In fact, God is not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), but it is not all up to God. We are commanded to hear (Acts 13:46); believe (Mark 16:16; John 3:16); repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30-31); confess (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10); and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21). These are all things we can read about in the NT and things we can do—without any direct operation of the Holy Spirit on our human spirits.

The Holy Spirit speaks to mankind through the Word of God. In writing letters to the seven churches of Asia, Jesus prefaced each letter He dictated to John with the word, “*Write,*” and He closed each letter with the statement, “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*” (Revelation 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22). What other conclusion can one draw than the fact that God’s Holy

Spirit speaks to us through the written Word of God? The Spirit’s influence which He seeks to bring to bear upon the heart of man is mediated through the Word. That is why the Word is Spirit-filled and full of power (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17). Yes, the Holy Spirit makes Christians, but He does not do it by a direct operation upon their hearts (spirits). His influence and power come through God’s Word.

SOME COMPARISONS OF SPIRIT AND WORD

In studying the work accomplished by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God there are some amazing parallels. [1] In Nehemiah 9:20 God instructed Israel through His good Spirit and in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we are instructed by God’s inspired Scripture. [2] In John 3:5 we are born of the Spirit and in 1 Peter 1:23 we are born by the word of God. [3] In John 6:63 the Spirit quickens (gives life) and the words spoken by Jesus are Spirit and life. Psalm 119:50 also says God’s word quickens. [4] In John 16:8 the Spirit convicts and Titus 1:9 says the faithful word convicts. [5] In Acts 9:31 the Holy Spirit provides comfort and in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 the inspired word brings comfort. [6] The Spirit sanctifies in 1 Peter 1:2 and Jesus prayed that God sanctify His apostles through the word of truth in John 17:17. [7] In Romans 8:2 the law of the Spirit of life sets us free and in John 8:31-32 Jesus taught that abiding in His word sets us free. [8] In Ephesians 3:16 the Spirit strengthens the inner man and in 1 John 2:14 we are strong because the word of God abides in us. [9] In Ephesians 5:18-19 we are to sing praise to God and speak to one another in song because we are filled with the Spirit and in Colossians 3:16 we are to do the same by letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly. [10] Romans 8:14 says we are to be led by

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the Spirit of God and in Psalms 43:3; 119:105 God's truth and word lead and guide us (cf. Psalm 73:24).

There are others, but these ten comparisons/parallels illustrate the way the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to accomplish His work. In fact, all together the Scriptures presented in this article, and many more that could be cited, show that in the Holy Spirit's work to influence the conscious mind of every accountable human being, He operates only through the medium or means of God's Divine Word. That does not mean that the Holy Spirit is only the Word of God. It does mean that God has chosen to channel the Spirit's power to convert the sinful spirits of unbelievers and to strengthen the inner being of Christians only by the appeal of that Word upon the conscious minds of those who hear or read it. Remember the passage cited near the beginning of this lesson: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly [completely, American Standard Version] furnished unto all good works"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Christians should always desire every gift God has given us to convert unbelievers and be strengthened ourselves, but there was no promise of a **direct aid** of the Spirit upon the minds of unbelievers or Christians, even during the limited age of miracles in the first century, in order to effect their conversion or strengthening. The **direct influence** of the Holy Spirit upon a human spirit (to convert an unbeliever or to aid a Christian) would be a miraculous influence and miracles were not for that purpose.

[To be continued next month]

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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