

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

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Date: 25 April 2010

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[0 : 00] Hi, everybody. Hi, Jim. Oh, wow, very good.

Very good, as ever, as ever. Well, let's pray. Just beforehand, do congratulate Keith and Aaron. For those of you that don't know, Keith and Aaron have been on staff here for a while. Aaron runs our Christianity Explored. Keith Ganser helps out a lot in the morning service. And both of them are about as different from each other as you could possibly be. If you know them, you'll know how much that's true. And yet it was a wonderful thing for them both to come under orders.

That's what ordination means. It means that they come under orders. They are commissioned to spend their life proclaiming the Word of God. And so it's a wonderful thing.

[0 : 59] It's a very joyful thing. So do take the advantage next time you see them to congratulate them. Let's pray together. Father, we just said that we believe in the Holy Spirit.

And we know that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and the giver of life. And our delight in the Holy Spirit is that He does, in fact, give us life.

And He gives us the life of Jesus. And there's no better life. There's no better life than that. And so we ask, Holy Spirit, that You would be very, very, very active in our hearts tonight.

And that You would grant us the ability to understand Your Word. That You would grant us the ability to see Jesus very clearly in Your Word. And You would grant us the ability to love You and to walk out of here full of Your power to obey You.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, we're continuing our series in the Holy Spirit. The weeks between Easter, actually the week after Easter we started, and we'll end toward the end of May, which in the church calendar is Pentecost.

[2 : 24] For these weeks, we are looking at the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Christian life. Last week, we talked about how the Holy Spirit gives us new life.

How the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts. Naturally, we as humans, we're very self-centered. We're very self-orientated people. So the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts in such a way that He kind of turns our hearts inside out.

So that instead of being focused upon ourselves above everything else, we become people who prefer Jesus over everything else. We love Jesus more than anything.

And that happens when you become a Christian. And the whole of the Christian life is a matter of living out our love for Jesus.

So we looked at that last week. This week, we're looking at how the Holy Spirit relates to the Word of God. How the Holy Spirit relates to the Scriptures. And I want to begin by reading to you one of the verses in the Bible that scares me most.

[3 : 41] I don't know if you... You've got to have those Scriptures. Like the Scriptures that you come to and you're like, ah, that's scary. Well, this is one that sends shivers down my spine.

We didn't read it in the service. It comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verse 38. And Jesus, at this point, He's talking to the Pharisees. He's talking to the religious leaders of the day.

And He says this. Just listen up. You do not have God's Word abiding in you. For you do not believe the one that He has sent.

And this is the bit that frightens me. You search the Scriptures because you think that by them you have life. But it is they that witness about me.

Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. Let me tell you why that frightens me so much.

[4 : 40] If you've been around St. John's for very long, you know that one of our highest ambitions as a church, and this is absolutely the way it should be, one of our highest ambitions as a church is

we want to be Bible people.

Absolutely. Absolutely. Just in every way. We love the Bible. I mean, we love the Bible. We want to study the Bible. We want to memorize the Bible. We want to live out the implications of what the Bible teaches us.

But the reason that passage, that verse scares me, is that Jesus is saying that you can spend your life studying the Bible and completely miss it.

And as a guy that spends his life studying the Bible, that's fairly frightening. I mean, Jesus is talking to his enemies here, right? He's talking to Pharisees, the religious leaders of his day, and these are the guys that kill Jesus.

And the scary thing is they were Bible people, kind of. They were certainly the Bible experts of their day. And so apparently you can know everything.

[5 : 59] I mean, these guys knew more about the Bible than my guess is that any of us here do. You can know almost everything there is to know about the Bible and still end up an enemy of Jesus. And that scares me like crazy.

So the question I want to ask tonight is quite simply, how do we become the right kind of Bible people? I mean, we know that it is right to love the Word of God.

Read Psalm 119. It's the longest chapter in the Bible. It will convince you with this kind of wave upon wave that cherishing the Word of God is absolutely right in the heart of God.

But the question for us, for me, is how do I become the right kind of Bible person, not a Pharisee, but one who has life? Okay?

And the answer to that question, I'll give it away right now. The answer to that question is it's the Holy Spirit. So what I want to look at is how does the Holy Spirit and the Bible relate to each other in such a way that we are filled with life?

[7 : 01] Okay? And the way I want to do, I want to kind of flesh that out with two questions. One, I want to look at for a little bit what the Holy Spirit did in the life of the apostles.

And then I want to look at what the Holy Spirit does in us with regard to the Word of God. Okay? So first of all, what did the Holy Spirit do in the life of the apostles? Take a look at the second reading. It's on the back sheet.

Okay? This is the same book that I just read from, but quite a bit later in it. Jesus is talking to his disciples, and this is the night right before he dies.

Jesus had a very, very long conversation with his disciples the night before he died, and he told them what was coming, basically. He told them that he was leaving.

And you can imagine that the disciples are just terribly perplexed, and they're terribly depressed, and they're terribly confused. Jesus says he's leaving.

[8 : 00] Now, how in the world? Why is Jesus leaving? I mean, we were just getting to good. I mean, they just gave us such a good reception in Jerusalem just a couple days ago, you know?

It's just getting momentum. Now Jesus says that he's leaving. And so they're very, very perplexed and confused. And then Jesus makes them even more confused because he says, No, it's actually to your benefit that I leave.

Look at verse 7. Jesus says, Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the helper, by which he means the Holy Spirit, the helper will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. Now, the question I would imagine that's in the disciples' minds is, Jesus, what in the world are you talking about?

How could it possibly be true that it's good for you to go away? How could it possibly be true that the Holy Spirit is better than your physical presence right here with us over dinner?

[9 : 13] I mean, how could that possibly be the case? And I think a lot of us ask the same question. I mean, haven't you ever been reading the Bible and thought, Man, I just wish I could see Jesus.

I wish I could go back in time, you know, wear cool sandals and funny robes, and walk around Galilee for a little bit and hang out with Jesus and that kind of thing.

But what Jesus is saying here in that passage is that the presence of the Holy Spirit is better, at least for right now. The presence of the Holy Spirit is better than Jesus' physical presence with us.

Now, I figure that's a big claim. Look at verse 12. How could that be true? Look at verse 12. Jesus is still talking to his disciples and he says this, I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come.

[10:23] And then verse 14 is very, very important. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and he will declare it to you. Okay. Focus in on this one.

This is very, very important. If you want to understand how the Holy Spirit relates to the Word of God, you've got to understand these verses. Jesus is looking at his disciples and he's saying, guys, you have a lot to learn.

Let me tell you, you have a lot to learn. But you can't take it right now. And when I go away, when I ascend to heaven, I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. I'm going to send the Spirit of truth.

I'm going to send the Spirit whose deep passion is to proclaim truth. And when the Spirit of truth, the Spirit out of which all truth that is true comes, when the Spirit of truth comes upon you, he is going to glorify me.

He's going to display my glory before you. And as he displays my glory, he's going to teach you who I am. Think about this.

[11:30] It's as if Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit is going to come and he's going to take everything that belongs to me and he's going to declare it to you. He's going to show my cards right in front of you so that you can see me with pristine clarity.

Let me see if I can explain this. Have you ever seen a floodlit building? Like a lot of times if you go to, you know, you have an old building.

Like this church would be a good one to floodlight, but I don't think we do. I don't think so. Anyway, like an old stone building that's really historic or whatever, at night they'll put floodlights outside it so it illuminates the entire building.

And there's just something remarkably gorgeous about a floodlit stone building. Now, that's what the Holy Spirit did for the apostles.

When lights at night shine on a building so that you can see it, it's like the glory of the building, the beauty of the building is just set before you with just wonderful clarity.

[12:40] And that's precisely what the Holy Spirit's ministry was to do. The Holy Spirit came to the apostles after Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit floodlit Jesus. And when the Holy Spirit floodlit Jesus, they were able to see his glory, his beauty.

They were able to see Jesus with pristine clarity, with actually more clarity than when he was physically with them. I know that seems weird, but when Jesus was physically with the disciples, I mean, if you read the Gospels, you know, they only kind of got him.

And a lot of times they were fairly off track. But when the Holy Spirit came and floodlit Jesus, they were able to see him with just an absolute pristine clarity.

They got it for the first time. They understood why he came. They understood what his teaching meant. They understood how they should follow him. But it wasn't just that. It wasn't merely intellectual, though it was intellectual.

The Holy Spirit also floodlit him to their hearts. So that not only did they understand Jesus, they loved Jesus more.

[13:57] And they knew Jesus better. And they were filled with a will and a desire to obey him in a way that they never had when they hung out with him physically. You see why Jesus says, it's actually to your advantage that I'm going to go away.

It was better for the Spirit to come than it was for Jesus to stay. And the reason is that the Holy Spirit came to the apostles and enabled them to understand Jesus and love him far, far, far, far more than they otherwise would have.

Now, I promise that this would have something to do with the Scriptures and with the Word of God. And the fact is it has everything to do with the Bible, guys. Everything to do with the Bible.

It doesn't talk about it precisely in this passage, but when you look at this passage in the context of the rest of the New Testament and in the context of the Bible as a whole, what becomes clear is that the Holy Spirit showed Jesus to the apostles with pristine clarity.

And what they saw, they wrote down. And we get to see what they saw when we read what they wrote. This is the promise.

[15:13] This is Jesus' promise that brought forth the Scriptures, brought forth the New Testament. And the remarkable thing is that what this means is that when we come to the Scriptures, both the

New Testament but also the Old Testament, when we come to the Scriptures, we are able to see Jesus with a type of clarity that the apostles never had until the Holy Spirit came upon them.

We actually get to see Jesus, at least in one sense. We get to see Jesus more clearly than if you were with Him historically walking the streets of Jerusalem and Galilee.

And that's a shocking, shocking reality. When you think about it, it even gets more shocking because the New Testament teaches that Jesus is the image of God.

If you look at Jesus, you see God. You see God's fullness. And what this passage tells us, what this passage implies, is that when you come to the teaching of the apostles, you see Jesus with just an absolute pristine clarity, which means we see God.

And friends, when you think about that, you can understand why the Bible from front to back, and particularly in the Psalms, is so filled with delight when it comes to God's Word.

[16:35] The Word of God is so precious, so much more precious than gold or silver or spoil or whatever. The psalmist, Psalm 119, Psalm 1 says, my delight is in the law of the Lord.

This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise, your Word gives me life. Why? Why? The Word gives life because it shows us Jesus.

And Jesus is the one who has life in himself, and he gives us life. Okay. That's what the Holy Spirit did in the life of the apostles. And we get to derive benefit from that as we open up the scriptures and read them and live by them.

Now, there's a danger here. There's a danger. If we stop there, if we just say, how does the Holy Spirit relate to the Bible?

Well, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write scriptures so that now we have this great book. If we stop there, we might misunderstand. We might misunderstand by thinking that all the Bible is, is a book of information about Jesus.

[17:47] And if we think that the Bible is just a book of information about Jesus, you will end up a Pharisee.

If you think that the Bible is just a book of information, you might be motivated to read the Bible. You might be motivated to study the Bible. You might be motivated to, in some sense, in some weird sense, believe the Bible.

But you'll never come to know Jesus. Why? Do you remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees? When I started with, the scary verse.

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But it's they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Okay. See, friends, the whole point of Christianity, the whole point of Christianity, is for us to come to know Jesus. And you can't get to know Jesus just by information.

[18:55] Information can give you ideas about who the person might be. But information alone does not create relationship. It doesn't link up. I can read about, you know, Martin Luther King Jr., but that doesn't mean I know the guy.

Now, here's where it gets good. Okay. Here's where the Holy Spirit didn't just stop working when he inspired the apostles.

The Holy Spirit does a work now in our life as we read the word, as we study the word of God. The Holy Spirit has another gift. And it's a precious gift to give directly to us through our hearts and through our minds.

Let me explain it, and then I'll show it. The Holy Spirit, as we read Scripture, as we hear Scripture proclaimed, as we talk about the word of God with one another, as we contemplate and ruminate on the gospel, the Holy Spirit now, today, comes and he shines light into our hearts.

The Holy Spirit comes and displays the glory of Jesus to our hearts so that we get to see Jesus.

The Holy Spirit, as we think about the word of God and proclaim it and hear it and meditate on it, shines light into our hearts so that we see Jesus, but not only so that we know information about him alone.

[20:23] The Holy Spirit goes beyond that. And the Holy Spirit allows us to understand him and to grow in love for him and to sense his love for us so that we gain power and a desire to go out and obey him and live our life for him in every area of our life.

See, it's not just that the Holy Spirit gave us a good book. This is not any old normal book. This is kindling and tender for the fire of God's Spirit.

And when you come to the word of God, God sends his light into our hearts and it is a precious gift and that's how we come to know Jesus and love him and feast upon him.

It's the food of the Christian life. Paul talks about this in a variety of different places. In 1 Corinthians 2, verse 12, it's not printed, he says this, just listen to it.

He says, we have received the Spirit who is from God in order that we might understand the things freely given to us by God. The Spirit is given to us in order that we might see the good news and we might see Jesus and understand him and follow him.

[21 : 47] You see, the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to the apostles so that they wrote down Scripture. But now the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us today as we come and see him in the word.

And Paul was talking about that in the first reading. I'm not going to go into that long run-on sentence in any detail, but if you can glance at verses 17 and 18, Paul is praying and his prayer is that God would send, it says, a spirit of wisdom and revelation, which it's very, very clear.

You'll have to take my word on this one, but you can come talk to me, I'll explain it. It's very clear that it's not just any spirit, it's talking about the Holy Spirit. Paul prays that God would give the Ephesians the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation that the eyes of their heart might be enlightened.

What does that mean? It means, you know, Paul was praying for Christians who already knew a lot about Jesus, but Paul's prayer is that the Holy Spirit would enlighten the eyes of their heart, which is where their will is, it's where they enjoy relationship, would enlighten the eyes of their heart so that the information they have about Jesus would turn into relationship with Jesus.

Friends, this is how the Holy Spirit gives life. We talked last week about how the Holy Spirit gives us new life and how the Holy Spirit starts us on the road of being a Christian by causing our hearts to go from being inward focused and self-centered to preferring and loving Jesus above all other things.

[23 : 27] As we live out the Christian life, the Holy Spirit continually, you know, kind of drip feeds us new life as we come to the Word of God and as He floods our hearts with light.

Now, let me give you an example here. Last week, I read you a little bit from St. Augustine. This week, I'm going to read to you a little bit from John Bunyan. John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress. This is not from Pilgrim's Progress, though you should read it. This is from his autobiography, which you should probably also read. And this is a point where John Bunyan is struggling with God. He's been very, very depressed. He's been filled with anxiety and terror and he tells a story. Oh, and he's been thinking about one verse of the Bible from 2 Corinthians 12 where Jesus says, my grace is sufficient for you.

He's been meditating on that verse. He picks up the story. Therefore, I was still praying to God that He would come in with His Scripture more fully on my heart.

[24 : 33] One day, when I was in a meeting of God's people, I was full of sadness and terror. My fears, again, were strong upon me and I was now thinking that my soul was never going to get better.

I began to think that my case was hopelessly sad and fearful. And at that moment, these words with great power suddenly broke upon me.

the words from 2 Corinthians 12, Jesus said, my power is sufficient for thee. My grace is sufficient for thee.

My grace is sufficient for thee. Three times together, these words broke upon me and oh, oh, I thought that every word was a mighty word unto me, that the word my and the word grace and the word sufficient and the words for thee, they were then and sometimes are still far bigger than any other words have ever been in my heart.

At that time, my understanding was so enlightened that it was as though I had seen the Lord Jesus look down from heaven through the tiles that were above me and directed these words to me personally.

[26 : 00] Now, do you see what happened in John Bunyan's life? The Holy Spirit, he had been thinking about a scripture passage and the Holy Spirit took the scripture and applied it directly to Bunyan's heart and it was as if Jesus himself was speaking to him and of course Jesus was speaking to him.

Now, in our lives, it often, usually is not that dramatic. It usually wasn't that dramatic in John Bunyan's life but it's helpful to look at the dramatic to illustrate the regular.

Usually, this is just part of the Christian life that as we soak in the word of God, the Holy Spirit comes and is always leading us to scripture and then through scripture to Jesus.

Jesus. Okay, a couple things to take away as we close. The first thing that we as a people need to do in response to all this is we need to continually tether together the word of God and the spirit of God.

Every now and then you'll hear people say, they usually don't say it explicitly but you listen to them a little bit and they want to emphasize the Holy Spirit but they don't really want to emphasize the Bible and then there's other people who want to emphasize the Bible but for the life of them they never talk about the Holy Spirit and you never sense that they're thirsting after the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 31] Now the Bible says that you can quench the Holy Spirit. Both approaches quench the Holy Spirit because if you emphasize the Holy Spirit but you don't emphasize the word you end up grieving the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit has given us the word of God and it's his most gracious gift.

The Holy Spirit wants us to apply our minds and rigorously think through the word of God because that's precisely how the Holy Spirit comes and transforms us. If you ignore the word and you emphasize the spirit before long you will have grieved the spirit in such a way that the spirit will be less and less active in your life.

But on the other hand if you emphasize the word of God but you ignore the spirit of God you're going to end up a Pharisee. You're going to end up a big headed jerk.

That grieves the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't want to fill you with information as an end in and of itself. The Holy Spirit wants you to love Jesus and obey Jesus.

He wants to bring you to scripture through to Jesus. So, some churches think of themselves as spirit-filled other churches think of themselves as word-based.

[28 : 52] Please, we have to be both. It's the only option before us. Okay? Good. Second thing. We need to learn as people how to meditate on God's word. Now, for some of us meditation, the word meditation sounds like an Eastern mystical kind of thing.

Christian meditation, Christians have always meditated. Okay? But Christian meditation is when deep thinking about God's word connects with deep seeking of God's spirit.

Okay? Deep thinking. We need to be a people who apply ourselves to the reading and the study and the understanding of God's word. God wants us to use all our intellectual abilities, every last one of them, pour it into understanding what God is trying to tell us through his word.

We're not to read mindlessly. We're not to take things out of context. We need to learn to be a people who continually ruminate and think about God's word, whether we're reading it in the morning or whether we're out at work or whether we're at school or wherever we're at.

But deep thinking needs to be connected with deep seeking. Deep seeking means that we're to be a people who are always seeking the Holy Spirit to give us more light. As we come and we read scripture, we're expectant that God is going to break in and speak and change us and challenge us and convict us and transform us.

[30 : 24] So we need to be a people who seek the Holy Spirit. And seeking the Holy Spirit means we're always asking the question, Spirit, show me Jesus in your word and make me love him and know his love for me.

And as we do, God will continually throughout the course of our life slowly give us more and more of the life of Jesus until that day when we see Jesus physically, finally, face to face.

And if we have walked in the Spirit the long years of our life, when we see Jesus physically, finally, we will be delighted, but we'll know who we're looking at because we'll have looked at him for all the long years of our discipleship.

Let's pray. Jesus, thank you so much for ascending to heaven and sending your Spirit.

Thank you so much for sending your Spirit in such a way that the apostles saw you so clearly and wrote of you so clearly. Thank you so much for your word.

[31 : 45] Thank you that you have given it to us in such a way that we can understand it. And thank you, Lord Jesus, that you continually fill us with your Spirit as we come to you in your word.

Grant us, O God, not to be Pharisees. Grant us, O Lord, to meet you in your word, to come to you and to receive life.

We ask this in your name. Amen.