

The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Inspiration and Illumination of Scripture

Anyone who attempts to strictly define the Holy Spirit's activity faces a tremendous challenge. It is impossible for mere man to fully comprehend God's activity in the world because he is limited in his understanding. Nevertheless, Scripture does give us some idea of how the Spirit has worked in the past. This study represents a tentative expression of one man's grasp of the issue.

The Inspiration of Scripture

When we refer to the inspired nature of Scripture we don't mean the same thing as a non-Christian when he or she might talk about an inspired performance in a play, or a bright idea. The word 'inspiration' comes from 2 Timothy 3:16 and is best translated as 'God-breathed'. 2 Peter 1:20-21 states that the Holy Spirit spoke through people in the past in a unique way, but how? Three explanations have been put forward:

1. **Dictation.** Some have accused Christians who accept inspiration of believing that God dictated the Scriptures. By this they don't mean that men acted like secretaries taking notes as God spoke, but rather that they became like a typewriter while God - totally overriding their minds and personalities - hit the right keys. This theory has been consistently rejected over the centuries and no respected theologian or church leader has ever held it.
2. **Accommodation.** This is the opposite extreme to the dictation theory. It states that God spoke through man, but in the process human sin and weakness became involved. The Bible is therefore flawed in parts and we must therefore pick out those parts which are from God. This theory stands in direct contradiction to Paul's statement in 2 Tim. 3:16 and is therefore rejected by Christians.
3. **Supervision.** This theory, which is accepted by the majority of Christians today, takes into account the mystery involved in the process of inspiration. God has spoken to us in many different ways (Heb. 1:1-2). Sometimes he has appeared to people and asked them to write down a message (note the difference between this and the Dictation Theory above), e.g. Isa. 8:1-2; Hab. 2:2; Rev. 1:19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14. Twice the Lord himself wrote on stone tablets (Exod. 32:15-17; 34:1). The people whom he used he often prepared in a special way (Jer. 1:3; Isa. 49:1; Gal. 1:15), but the fact that they were sometimes his enemies did not prevent God from speaking through them (Num. 23-24; John 11:49-50). The process was clearly very intimate,

because when Luke started his research for Theophilus he did so not because he knew that he was writing new Scripture, but simply because it seemed like the right thing for him to do (Luke 1:3). The Spirit used the personalities of the people he chose to write His thoughts in their words.

The Holy Spirit and Illumination

The death of John the Apostle brought to an end the period of Biblical inspiration. No new has been given since that day, despite that claims of Mohammed, Joseph Smith and many others. Today as we read the Scriptures we depend upon the Holy Spirit to *illuminate* them for us. This process is as dynamic as inspiration and as difficult to define. The Spirit uses our personalities and backgrounds to help us to apply the Word of God given thousands of years ago to our everyday lives now. The Spirit helps us as we read the Scriptures to close the gap between us and the original writers and overcome the effects of sin in our thinking processes.

The most dangerous error to avoid comes in the form of the claims made by certain preachers to receive "revelation knowledge" - direct information from the Holy Spirit that is, in effect, treated as the Word of God. Such revelations in the past have included the statement that there are nine people in the Trinity(1) and that Jesus did not pay for the sin of mankind on the cross.(2) There is one very important principle that must be clearly understood. There are some who believe that you don't need to do any work for yourself to determine what a difficult text might mean. They simply read it and pray and then tell you that the text **MUST** mean so-and-so - because the Holy Spirit told them! Some go even further, despising any knowledge that comes through study and championing instead what they call "Revelation Knowledge."(3) The main reason for this appears to be to cut the ground from under those who would oppose their teaching on the basis of sound biblical exegesis. Anyone who challenges their interpretation is not challenging their ideas, but Jesus Christ Himself.(4)

This is extremely dangerous because it means that their opinion is not open to being tested. I think that in some cases the problem comes from a misunderstanding of the 'word of knowledge' (1 Cor. 12:8). To such a person I would say that spiritual gifts or words from the Spirit must be tested by the Word of God. If you rely on an impression on its own to tell you what the Bible means, then you are putting that impression above the Bible, and you can't test it using the Bible. There must be an objective way of testing whether a particular interpretation is correct, because subjective feelings or impressions can be mistaken. So, if anyone tries to persuade you that a text means something on the basis of a 'word' and cannot back it up with a logical scriptural argument, then you are free to ignore what that person is saying.

I have often found passages in Scripture or subjects that I could not understand. In those situations when I have prayed the Holy Spirit has directed me to a book, a tape, a meeting or a brought a person across my path who has been able to explain it and help me. We can't be too narrow in our expectations of how the Holy Spirit can speak. He certainly was not limited in the ways he chose to speak to men in the past.

References

(1) Benny Hinn, "Benny Hinn" program on TBN (3 October 1990), cited in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 123-124: "Man, I feel revelation knowledge already coming on me here. Lift your hands. Something new is going to happen here today. I felt it just as I walked down here. Holy Spirit, take over in the name of Jesus.... God the Father, ladies and gentlemen, is a person; and He is a triune being by Himself separate from the Son and the Holy Ghost. Say, what did you say? Hear it, hear it, hear it. See, God the Father is a person, God the Son is a person, God the Holy Ghost is a person. But *each one* of them is a *triune* being by Himself. If I can shock you - and maybe I should - there's *nine of them*. Huh, what did you say? Let me explain: God the Father, ladies and gentlemen, is a person with his own personal spirit, with his own personal soul, and his own personal spirit-body. You say, huh, I never heard that. Well you think you're in this church to hear things you've heard for the last 50 years? You can't argue with the Word, can you? It's all in the Word."

(2) Frederick K.C. Price, *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger* (June 1980), 7: "Do you think that the punishments for our sin was to die on a cross? If that were the case, the two thieves could have paid the price. No the punishment was to go to hell itself and to serve time in hell separated from God... Satan and all the demons of hell thought that they had him bound, and they threw a net over Jesus and they dragged Him down to the very pit of hell itself to serve our sentence." Kenneth Copeland, Personal letter, Ft. Worth, Texas, March 12, 1979 (*italics added*): "Jesus went into hell to free mankind from the penalty of Adam's high treason... When his blood poured out it did not atone... Jesus spent three horrible days and nights in the bowels of this earth getting back for you and me our rights with God." Both cited in D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen Publishers, 1988), 120.

(3) The peddlers of the "Health & Wealth Gospel" are the most infamous examples of this teaching, e.g. Kenneth E. Hagin, *Growing Up Spiritually*. (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 1982), 107-108.

(4) See further McConnell, 63. McConnell points out that far from being divine in origin, Hagin's "Revelations" are often plagiarised from other writers, many influenced by the metaphysical cults.
