

Scripture and the work of the Spirit

Let's pray...

As most of you know, this summer, we've been journeying together through a study on the Holy Spirit – on the person, passions and work of the Spirit. Which, as we've said, is not just a **fascinating** topic, but is a **vital** topic for us to be exploring together – because this is the essential reality of the Christian life for all of us.

Life in Christ – following Jesus today – is fundamentally a life lived **by the Spirit**.

Everything we know of God and experience of God happens **by** the Spirit. Our experience of the Father, our experience of God's grace and acceptance, our knowing Jesus, our being united with Him, our communion with Jesus all happens **by the Spirit**.

By the Spirit who, in grace, has come to dwell in us – in all who bow in faith to Jesus...

As Gordon Smith, a wise Christian teacher, **has distilled this**.

"The genius of the Christian life is the resolve, willingness and capacity to respond personally and intentionally to the prompting of the Spirit. To be a Christian is to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, to respond to the Spirit, who transforms us into the image of Christ..." (The Voice of Jesus, p.16)

This is why we are spending this season talking together about the Holy Spirit and everyday life in the Spirit - because this is the reality of the Christian life today for all of us.

And, as I hope you've noticed, I've intentionally not spent much time on the more dramatic experiences that are often associated with the Holy Spirit. Because I think we've often limited the Spirit's work to the dramatic – the **extraordinary** – so much so that, we've lost sight of the ordinary, everyday work of the Spirit – that permeates and animates and sustains all of our lives... that we need to wake up to and celebrate.

But that said, next Sunday, I want to actually dive right into the deep end of the **extraordinary** work of the Spirit – the **wild** & **surprising** experiences that we see or hear about or maybe have experienced relative to the Spirit – the kinds of experiences people often equate with renewal... The kinds of experiences that at times can cause great confusion and division in the Christian community.

And we need to go there to make sense of how to discern the Spirit in it all...

So, that's **next Sunday**...

But **today** we're still in the land of the ordinary – the **everyday life** in the Spirit – "normal Christian experience".

And with this in mind, one topic that we **need** to spend some time on, and yet could easily **ignore** – is the matter of scripture – the Bible – and how it **factors into our lives as we seek to walk by the Spirit.**

Now it might seem odd for me to say that we could easily **ignore** the Bible in this conversation – since over the last 8 weeks, all of what we have discussed about the Spirit, learned about the person and work of the Holy Spirit has been drawn from our study of Scripture – the Bible...

And yet, even in the midst of this, we could so easily miss and misunderstand the **deeper** reality that **the Bible itself is the work of the Spirit.**

It is not just **the means** by which we learn about the Spirit.

It is itself the work of the Spirit.

Or said another way: **the Bible is itself a gift of the Spirit – to me... to you... and to us...**

Which is something we need to understand and be shaped by – because here and there, in our day, as in every age, there are Christians who, in the process of delving into the things of the Spirit, and in a desire to live entirely in the Spirit and by the Spirit, have actually ended up **putting scripture aside**, leaving it behind, as though it is something that's no longer needed – **because we have the Spirit.**

As though **real life** in the Spirit comes only as we move **beyond** Scripture – the Written Word – to the Living Word that, is claimed, comes **straight** from the Spirit...

In a way, I suspect many of us, have had moments – seasons – where this draw – this conviction – has been alive in us...

And yet this temptation – this urge – this draw – is **clearly not** one that comes from the Spirit. For it is the Spirit who **gives us scripture** and who calls us to **devote ourselves to** it – as the **ongoing** means of His gracious and much-needed ministry – to us and among us today...

As the Spirit's **chosen** means by which He continues to speak and act and make God and His will and ways known to us.

Through scripture...

As the apostle Paul says in **Ephesians 6:17** – "*the sword of the Spirit... is the word of God.*" **The Spirit and the Word are bound together.** If we are to walk intimately with the Spirit, we must attend deeply to His Word.

In truth, it is impossible to conceive of a study on the Spirit that would not lead us to celebrate the gift of **Scripture** and call us to devote ourselves to Scripture. Or conversely, it is impossible to do any real study on Scripture without being led to celebrate the Spirit and bow in dependence upon to the Spirit.

The two – **the Spirit and the Word** – are intimately related. Simply put: **we would not have the Bible if not for the Spirit.**

Listen to what the apostle Paul writes in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**.

(and if you have a Bible with you, turn here with me – cause this is a verse we need to immerse ourselves in.)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – **Paul declares:** "*All scripture is God-breathed, and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

That's a well-known verse, right? One that many of us have read, or maybe even memorized, at some point.

But that said, if we're honest, it is **not** a verse that many of us actually believe or take seriously. Or at least not **all the time**.

Cause if we did, we would open our Bibles often, coming often, with humility and thankfulness and hunger to be taught and formed and renewed by the Spirit – *through scripture*...

Listen again to Paul's words.

He says: "**All Scripture is God-breathed.**"

Not: the Bible is full of amazing stories about how God-breathed life into different people in the past.

But "**All Scripture is God-breathed.**"

It is **breathed-out** by the Spirit. That's what this word means.

Some translations say "inspired". But the greek word literally means **ex-spired**. **Breathed out** from God – from **the Spirit**. His

Word that gives life – that brings order out of chaos – that renews and heals and restores... *All Scripture is **God-breathed**...*

And not just some of it, but **all Scripture** – even the book of Leviticus and Numbers, and the genealogies in the gospels. **All of it** is in some way the means of *God's personal life-giving revelation and action* today... **All Scripture**.

Not just the New Testament, not just the gospels, not just the red letters (the words of Jesus). But **all of it** – the whole of the Christian Bible – Old and New Testament...

All Scripture is God-breathed...

And notice this little but **explosive** word – **is**.

Paul says, "**All Scripture is God-breathed.**"

Is... Not just **was**, but **is**.

That's huge. That's a game-changer... Because it means that the Spirit's work in and through scripture **isn't over**... isn't just something that was **in the past**. But something that **is today**.

As you and I come to attend to God's revelation in scripture, we are attending to something that the Spirit **is** still active in – breathing out to us...

"All Scripture is God-breathed."

Which means that the Bible – the whole of it – all scripture – is **still** both **the result of the Spirit's** work (the gift of the Spirit to us) **and the ongoing means** of His work today...

The ongoing means of the Spirit's work of **revelation** – revealing God and His work and will and ways to you and to me...

And the ongoing means of His **re-creating** work. His **restoring** work... **renewing** work... taking what is out of sorts and making it whole again...

That's what Paul says in the lesser-known **second-half of these** verses... That the purpose of scripture, the reason that the Spirit has given us the Bible is **not** just so we'll be set straight in our understanding (though that is a significant part of the Spirit's work), but so that **our lives** will be set straight – trained in righteousness – equipped for every good work.

Not **just** for *religious work*. But for **every good work**...

What an incredible gift – **that we all need and long for...!**

For the Spirit to breathe His life into us – to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us in righteousness, that we would be thoroughly equipped, restored and renewed – to do the work He has called us to do...

Is that not something we all long for – to be enabled by God to do the work that God has created us to do.

And **for this very reason**, the Spirit has given us Scripture – has **breathed out** Scripture – and called us to attend to it, wrestle with it, and live by it... That by His Word, the Spirit might **continue** to restore, renew and empower us **for every good work**.

And yet...

And yet, as many of us know by experience, it is possible to read the Bible for years – *the Bible that is God-breathed* – to take classes on the Bible, to hear the Bible read or taught countless times, to even lead Bible studies and teach from the Bible – *and yet not experience the life-giving revelation of God... to not experience the renewal that comes from hearing God speak...*

How is this? How can this be? How are we to make sense of this deep and profound – **yet all-too-common** – disconnect?

Because it is the case for some of us.

And probably, **all of us**, *at times*.

So, why? Why is this? How does this happen?

Well, in God's grace – He tells us– **in Scripture**.

Turn with me to **1 Cor 2:11-13** and listen with me to what God, by the Spirit, through the apostle Paul, tells us.

1 Cor 2:11-13. Paul writes...

For who knows a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit within? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God

except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

What's Paul's saying?

He's saying that ***we cannot know God unless God reveals Himself to us... unless God makes Himself known to us... and enables us to receive His revelation!***

Which is the very purpose of Scripture, *is it not?*

That through scripture God might make Himself known to us... and breathe His life into us?!

Yes...

But. [And this is a significant **but.**]

But scripture – even *Spirit-inspired Scripture* – is not sufficient to make God known to us. ***For this we need the Spirit.***

We need the Spirit who ex-spired scripture to inspire us as we attend to Scripture – to open our eyes and minds – to illumine our hearts to comprehend – to receive God's revelation...

Without this, we may read and hear and know the Bible, but we will not hear and know God. ***Without this,*** we may read and hear and know the Bible, but not in a way that brings and bears the life of God to us or to others.

A.W. Tozer, in his book The Divine Conquest (written more than half a century ago) **called this: Textualism.**

Textualism... Which is simply orthodoxy without the Holy Spirit. Everywhere among [the church] we find persons who are Bible-taught but not Spirit-taught. They conceive truth to be something they can grasp [figure out] with the mind. If a person holds to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, they are thought to possess divine truth. But it does not follow. **There is no truth apart from the Spirit...** *For anyone to understand revealed truth requires an act of God equal to the original act which inspired the text.* (84)

Let me read that last sentence **again – "For anyone to understand revealed truth requires an act of God equal to the original act which inspired the text."**

That is a bold statement, but it is exactly what God says through Paul in his letter to the Corinthians – in **1 Cor 2:11-13**. It is not enough for us to read and study and hear Scripture taught, we need the Spirit who inspired Scripture to inspire us.

Again, to quote another wise Christian, **David Watson**. He writes, Until the Holy Spirit illumines our dull minds and warms our cold hearts, we do not receive God's revealed truth, no matter how accurately we know the right words and teach them to others... For an intellectual grasp of the Bible does not in itself bring spiritual life. **It is only the Spirit that gives life.** (144)

It is only **by the Spirit** that we can come to truly know God and life with God...

Which is why we find the apostle Paul praying **continually that** "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you

the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better."

(Eph 1:17)

And again in his letter to the **Colossians** – "**We continually** ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding **that the Spirit gives** so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way." (Col 1:9f)

Which doesn't mean that we're to lay aside Scripture so that we can truly seek *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation...*

I've tried that – as I'm sure many of us have.

And yet in those times, again and again, the Spirit has reminded me that *the sword of the Spirit is **the word of God**...* That God has **chosen**, above all, to speak to us (to you and to me) **through scripture...**

This isn't about laying aside Scripture so that we can seek *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*. But *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation* calls and invites us **to Scripture on our knees** – to come *with our hearts, and minds, and lives, bowed in dependence upon the Spirit – who alone can **fill us** with the knowledge of God and the life of God...*

And thankfully, in the grace of God, this is what the Spirit is seeking to do.

And I say this because this is what the gospel teaches us.

Even more than you and I desire to know God, **God wants us to know Him** – **deeply and personally** – in a sanctifying and life-giving way.

This is not something that many religions claim – but this is at the heart of our faith (whether we know it or not). **That God wants to be known** – and because of this, He has gone to incredible lengths to make Himself known to us – in history (in Israel's story), in Jesus, and now, **by the Spirit - through Scripture...**

This is why the Spirit has come, and why He has given us the Bible. Not just as the record of his revelation in the past, but as the **means** of his revelation to us today...

This is why, week after week, I get up here with **great faith**, rather than great fear – not because I think that I'm a great preacher, but because **I know** that even more than I long for God to speak to us, **God longs** to speak to us and reveal Himself to us.

And again and again – He does – through His Word, by the Spirit...

And this is why, in and through all the ups and downs of my journey with God (and I have many ups and downs) I keep coming back to bow before God in His Word – to listen again **to God** and **for God** in the pages of Scripture... Because I know that God wants me to know Him, and through His Word, the Spirit still speaks...

Which doesn't mean that every time we open our Bibles or come to hear God's word preached we are going to have a profound spiritual revelation. I wish... *As I'm sure you do.*

There are many days where I open my Bible to read or study, and God doesn't seem to open up anything of Himself to me.

And yet, in the midst of this, there are many other days – as there has been recently– where I have come to God in His Word – hungry to hear – and have found the Spirit near, speaking, offering words of comfort and counsel that I so deeply need. Opening my eyes to see what God sees and filling me with hope again...

And looking back over these years, I can see how the Spirit has used scripture to do exactly what Paul describes in **2 Timothy 3:16-17.**

Through scripture the Spirit has **taught** me (about Himself, and the Father and the Son, and about myself, about sin, and life, and repentance, and grace)... Through scripture, the Spirit has **rebuked** me – in love – and **corrected** me – and **trained** me in righteousness – in ways that have changed me – in my heart, my motives, my relationships, my solitude... **Equipping** me – restoring me, renewing me.

In truth, I would not be who I am today if not for the grace of the Spirit – the work of the Spirit – mediated to me through Scripture.

Which is why I keep coming back to bow to the Spirit in scripture
– because in the mystery of God's ways, it is here – in and through the
Word – that the Spirit continues to speak and act and give us life **in**
the Son – in Jesus...

And so let us come today – to Jesus – in thankfulness for the
gifts of His grace...

For the **cross**, for the **Spirit**, and for the **Word**,
by which we may know Christ today.

1 Cor 11 - invite the church to come to Christ today – by the Spirit...

the benediction -----

Listen, each Sunday, at the outset of the sermon, we bow before
God in prayer – asking for God to speak through His word to us, don't
we?

Why is that?

Because we know that **unless the Spirit takes the word and
brings revelation** – than we have simply heard another sermon.

And so we pray – with hungry hearts – that the God who longs
to be known would make Himself known to us – as we come to listen
to His word in faith... that the Spirit who inspired the Word would
inspire us through His Word...

I love this practice.

But it can't just happen on Sundays. We need to do the same
whenever we open Scripture – together and alone... How often do we
race through our own Bible reading the same way we read a FaceBook
post or a work memo?

Scripture is the gift of the Spirit to us. But the Spirit's work
doesn't end there. We need Him to inspire us as we read, and listen...
that through His Word we might come to truly hear and know God...

And that is what God wants to do...

*May God lead us to scripture on our knees – more and more –
that we might receive His Word – more and more...*

Scott b. Anderson
2 Timothy 3:16

LPC's summer 2018 series – By the Spirit
"Scripture and the work of the Spirit"