

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality

The Spirit and the Word

Lesson #1 for January 7, 2017

Scriptures: 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Psalm 119:160; John 17:17.

1. The most important gift that the Holy Spirit has given us is the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful^k for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, ¹⁷ so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., 2 Timothy 3:16-17). New York: American Bible Society. [*k: or Every scripture inspired by God is also useful.*]

2. The book of 2 Timothy written by Paul just before his beheading and addressed to Timothy has a number of very important messages for us. One of the most frequently quoted is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. But, not every version has that verse translated in the same way:

“All scripture, inspired of God....” (*Rheims*, 1582)

“Every Scripture divinely inspired, is....” (*N. Scarlett*, 1798)

“Every Writing [is] God-breathed....” (*Young’s Literal Translation*)

“Every Scripture, seeing that it is God-breathed, is....” (*Montgomery*)

“Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching....” (*ASV*)

“Every Scripture that is inspired by a spirit of God can....” (*Greber*)

“Every holy Writing which comes from God is of profit....” (*Basic English*)

“Every inspired scripture is....” (*Translator’s*) [Footnote: “All scripture is inspired and is....”]

“Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error....” (*NEB*)

“Every divinely inspired composition is useful....” (*Dickinson*) [Brackets and content in brackets are in the version quoted, indicating supplied word(s).]

3. Paul recognized that even in his day, many people were writing stories and telling of events concerning the life of Christ; some of those were very far from the truth. Others were beginning to spin tales of some new philosophies impacting Christianity. So, when Paul was writing to Timothy, almost certainly, in effect, he was saying to him: Every Scripture that *is inspired of God* is profitable.... And he was quite certain that Timothy knew how to pick out those which were reliable and those which were not.
4. Without the Bible where would we be? Have you recently thanked the Holy Spirit for inspiring the Scriptures?

None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great [594] conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* 593.2-594.0. [Bold type is added.]

5. There are two parts to the process of getting God’s Word into human minds. The first part
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is called revelation; the second part is called inspiration.

6. Think of the chain of events that must take place for God's thought to get into your mind: 1) God had an idea. 2) He chose the Holy Spirit and/or some angel to deliver that message to a prophet or Bible writer. 3) That writer did his best to put the idea(s) that he had either seen or heard into human language. 4) That original copy, called an *autograph*, of the prophet's work was copied and copied and copied in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek for the benefit of others. 5) Eventually, people wanted to read the message in their own language, and it was translated from the original language into other languages. Then, those new translations were copied again and again. 6) Eventually, when the printing press became available, copies were printed. Finally, 7) We read it in a language that we can understand and try to comprehend—with the help of the Holy Spirit—what God is trying to say to us.
7. Through the steps of revelation and inspiration, the Bible came to human beings through the Holy Spirit as His most important work. Without it, we would be clueless, ignorant, and hopeless.

The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* 669.2.

8. Thus, we see that the Holy Spirit was active not only in producing the inspired Scriptures in the beginning but also in helping us to understand them. What role do you think God the Father or the Holy Spirit played in preserving the records, producing copies, and translating them into other languages? Were the people doing each of those tasks also inspired?
9. The process we call revelation involves God through whatever means He chooses, revealing some truth that is beyond human capacity to know to a prophet or a judge or king who then attempted to write it down for the benefit of others.
10. What important truths need to be revealed to us? Those include: The great controversy, the character of God and of Satan, the details of creation, the story of the flood, and how we can be saved. Those also include the truth about the future including: The second coming, the millennium, the third coming, and the restoration of all things, besides many other details. *Revelation* means an unveiling or uncovering of something that would otherwise be hidden from us. We would know nothing about these things without revelation.
11. How much can we know about God apart from His revelation which we call special revelation? Enough to be saved? Enough to survive through the end? See Romans 1:20.
12. In 2 Peter 1:19-21, Peter discussed how the holy Scriptures have come down to us. Compare 1 Peter 1:10-12. Some people regard the *King James Version* as being especially inspired. Is that true? Did the Bible writers always understand what it was that God was trying to reveal to them? What was it that the angels wanted to understand?
13. Would it be correct to say that the Bible has only one ultimate Author? And that was God Himself? Sometimes, the prophets themselves did not fully understand what they wrote!
14. Clearly, God could have used angels to write out a Bible that would probably have been much better and more clear than what we have. Why didn't He do that? Why does God

choose to use human beings to proclaim His word at the present time?

15. Inspiration is the process of getting God's ideas into our heads. The Holy Spirit is just as active at this end of the process as He was in revealing the truth to prophets back in the beginning. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) Notice that the Holy Spirit's main work is to reveal the truth about God, and the Bible is the main method the Holy Spirit has used.
16. How do we explain the essential unity all through Scripture even though it took about 1500 years for it to be written down? Do you find any major contradiction(s) in the Scripture that raise questions about its inspiration? Some people look only for contradictions!
17. At times, God revealed His messages to prophets through visual presentations. They saw something as a kind of picture; they needed to describe it as best they could in their own human words. At other times, God spoke clearly to them in a language they could understand, and they were able to write God's words. But, we need to understand that those prophets were not just God's pen, automatically writing without thinking; they were His penmen.

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages, Book 1*, 21.1 [Bold type is added.]

18. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13. In these verses Paul suggested that God has revealed things to us that no human eye could ever see. The revelations came through the Spirit, and Paul was very certain that the source of those words was God Himself.
19. Read Joshua 10:13 and Luke 1:1-3. What kind of sources were these writers referring to? Were those reliable historical sources? A careful look through the historical books of the Bible, especially 1 & 2 Chronicles, will reveal that there are at least 24 books that the Bible writers referred to, and from which they apparently copied, of which we now have no portion available to us except what is in the Bible.
20. What happened to the book of Jashar? (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18)

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do His work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* vi.3; *Selected Messages, book 1*, 26.1; *LHU* 118.2; *ML* 41.2; *YRP* 224.3.
21. Has God carefully guided and protected the scriptural Records down through the generations? The Bible tells us that God hates falsehood (Exodus 20:16); He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18); He is repeatedly called the God of truth (Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16); and the Spirit Himself is called the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). Does that guarantee that every passage of Scripture in every translation is "the Word of God"? (Compare *Education* 81.)
22. Read Psalm 119:160. What does it mean to say that all of God's "righteous judgments are eternal"? Jesus Himself said in His final prayer as recorded in John 17:17, "Your word is truth."

23. Read Hebrews 4:12. Many people approach Scripture as if it is their job to judge it. That is the wrong approach. It is our job to study it and to accept it. The Scriptures are to speak the truth to us and judge our motives, thoughts, and ideas.
24. It is true, of course, that the Bible was written at specific times to particular individuals or groups and in their cultural setting. Does that mean that something written to another time and place and culture is not very important to us? Of course not! Why is it that so many so-called Christians reject a six-day creation, the worldwide flood, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the idea of a literal second coming of Jesus?
25. Stop and ask yourself this question: Who understands the truth best? We? Or, God?
26. As we mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit must play a key role not only in the giving of Scripture in the beginning but also in our understanding it properly.
27. So, how does the Holy Spirit help us to understand the Scriptures? There are some Christian groups who believe that if you do not speak in tongues, for example, you cannot claim to have the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit help them to understand the Scriptures in a better way than it does those of us who have not spoken in tongues? Read 1 Corinthians 2:13-14. What does it mean to say that “spiritual things are spiritually discerned”? Those who “speak in tongues” want to focus only on that aspect of their lives.
28. Unfortunately, the Scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit often point out our sins. Our initial response is often rebellious. And we know that rebellion is sin. Is the problem in such cases that we cannot really understand God’s Word? Or, is it simply that we do not want to accept what it says? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in such a situation?

Many contradictory opinions in regard to what the Bible teaches do not arise from any obscurity in the book itself, but from blindness and prejudice on the part of interpreters. Men ignore the plain statements of the Bible to follow their own perverted reason.—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 27, 1885, par. 8.

29. Can you think of a time when your human pride has been a stumbling block, hindering you from applying the truth(s) of Scripture in your own life? What do we need to do in such a case?
30. Read John 5:39,46-47; and John 7:38-39. What Scriptures was Jesus referring to in those passages? Did Jesus recognize that He was the One whom the Old Testament prophets had spoken about? Jesus’s life from birth to death was repeatedly foretold in the Old Testament. Jesus had a terrible time convincing His disciples that He would die and how He would die.
31. How should we respond to people who claim that they have received direct revelations from the Holy Spirit but when investigating them we find that they are in direct contradiction to some portion(s) of Scripture?

Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 671.1; *AG* 199.2; *LHU* 179.6; *YRP* 13.2.

32. Ellen G. White has made the following abundantly clear:

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which

all teaching and experience must be tested.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* vii.3; *LHU* 118.5; *3SM* 30.5; *YRP* 122.4.

The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* Dec. 15, 1885, par 16; *Selected Messages, bk. 1*, 416.2; See also *5MR* 49.1; *3SM* 21.1.

Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 504.3 (1890); *4T* 449.1; *Gospel Workers* (1892) 140.2; *AG* 350.5.

It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* 598.2. [Bold type is added.]

33. If the Holy Spirit was the One primarily responsible for giving us the Bible, would it be logical to find Him now contradicting what He had said previously?
34. When people come claiming they are inspired and have a message from God, probably we should not judge them. But, we can judge the truthfulness of their message.
35. Think for a moment about truths that are clearly presented in the Bible but about which the world in our day has a completely different idea. One of the obvious instances is creation versus “the Neo-Darwinian synthesis.” What about the many miracles recorded in Scripture? Does the world really believe that Jesus is coming again soon? Do they really believe that Jesus died for their sins and that we can be saved for eternity only by our faith in Him? We have suggested on several occasions that a key to understanding Scripture is our understanding of the great controversy over God’s character and government. What does the world know about our understanding of the great controversy?
36. How should we respond when we read something in the Bible or perhaps in the writings of Ellen White which directly contradicts some personal inclination that we have?

Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death and to rise again from the tomb, and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples were looking for temporal deliverance from the Roman yoke, and they could not tolerate the thought that He in whom all their hopes centered should suffer an ignominious death. **The words which they needed to remember were banished from their minds; and when the time of trial came, it found them unprepared. The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them.** *Ibid.* 594.1. [Bold type is added.] (See Luke 18:31-34.)

37. What does it mean for something to be “true”? Seventh-day Adventists have talked a lot about *present truth*. In fact, we had a journal or magazine by that name for some time. Does that mean that truth may change? What is meant by *present truth*?
38. When you open the Bible, do you immediately think to yourself that this is the Word of God? Are you willing to submit yourself to the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the Word of God? Is it clear in your mind what the differences are between revelation and inspiration? As you think about

the Bible, do you regard it as a collection of inspirational writings? Or, as the authoritative, life-changing Word of God? Why is it that the Bible has the capacity to transform our lives? What is different between inspired Writings and other writings?

39. If someone that you know personally—perhaps at church or elsewhere—came to you and said that s/he had received a special message from the Holy Spirit, how would you respond?
40. There is plenty of evidence in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White that God never uses coercion or force. How is that different from Satan's methods?
41. God wants us to know the truth. What is the most important truth of all? It is the truth about God Himself. Do we understand clearly the implications of God's character of unselfish love versus Satan's character of self-centered pride?
42. We need to consider a couple more points that we need to understand about the Holy Spirit's guidance as we study Scripture. A repeated, careful reading of Scriptures will set us free from the errors that surround us in the world. John 8:32 (GNB) says: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
43. The Holy Spirit also reveals to us the truth about ourselves. God is forgiveness personified. When we approach Him, we need to recognize that our guilt can be gone. (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:1) We also need to recognize that God regards us as His sons and daughters. (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:19) No matter how awful or shameful or guilty we may feel, if we turn to God, He will regard all of that as past history; He is ready to start over with us again.
44. Why is it that in light of all we have studied in this lesson, so many Christians seem to have nothing more than a nominal experience with God?

The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He [Jesus] could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. **The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.** The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer.** It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.

Of the Spirit Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me." The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. **The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* 671.1-3. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

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