

## The Holy Spirit as Interpreter of the Word

We are now in a position to see the work of the Holy Spirit as the Provision for understanding the Word of God. In the first section of this paper we set forth the unique character of the Word which we study. The fact that it is a personal Revelation of God Himself the fact that it is an absolutely accurate and authoritative Revelation of God the fact that it is a powerful Revelation of God and that it has Salvation as its object, raises the study of Scripture out of the ordinary sphere of academic disciplines. The Scripture constantly presents saving truth to its student. But we have also noted the obstacles which the Word encounters in the student the sin which afflicts his natural reasoning processes, and the personal adversary, Satan, who still finds access through sinful human nature whereby to deceive "the very elect."

It becomes very obvious, therefore, that the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling the understanding of God's Word is nothing more nor less than a specific application of His sanctifying work in the area of the mind. This will require an active and continued cooperation of the believer with the Holy Spirit in activating the principle of death to all independence or self confidence of reasoning in the study of Scripture. Nothing is so surely wrong as the confidence that we can work out the proper understanding and application of God's Word by a full dependence upon our own exegetical ability. The Holy Spirit will also lead the believer forth in a prevailing resistance to the deceptions of Satan as the study of the Word progresses a resistance which is genuine and forceful through grace, because of the knowledge that there is a real and subtle foe. Thus the ministration of the Holy Spirit in applying redemption to the student's mind becomes the key to a correct understanding of Scripture.

The work of the Holy Spirit in, with, and by the Word is of supreme importance to the student of Scripture. Nor is the Scripture silent about this specific, function of the Holy Spirit. In the very first instruction that Jesus gives His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit on the occasion of His final discourses to them, He speaks of the coming Comforter as the Spirit of Truth a frequent and significant characterization of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Later on in the same series of discourses (John 15:26), Jesus refers to Him again as the Spirit of Truth and says that "He shall testify of me." In the following chapter comes a most specific promise:

"Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak from himself, but what things soever he shall hear: these shall he speak; and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)."

That the ministry of the Holy Spirit promised here, although perhaps specifically related to the process of Inspiration by which the Scriptures were to be completed, was not confined to that particular fulfillment is indicated by the repetition of this doctrine in John's first epistle:

"And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him. (I John 1:27)."

As John's own writings were probably the only ones to be added to the Canon of Holy Writ at the time of this statement, it is quite obviously a statement of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing truth to the believer.

We have in the process of studying Scripture, then, these three factors: A Revelation of saving truth, a weak and sinfully debilitated natural reason, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who has been given to "help our infirmities." (Rom. 8:26). It is His work in, with, and by the Word which brings it correctly to our understanding.

It ought to be noted carefully, by way of guarding ourselves from error, that we are not describing an ethereal or subjective process when we speak of the Holy Spirit's ministry of interpreting the Word. By no means is it meant to imply by the statements we have made, that the student of the Word is to open his Bible, get some words of the text before him, and then make his mind blank to receive the "interpretation" of the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing in the Scripture to indicate that any of the Holy Spirit's ministry to us is of this character. Rather we are speaking of a very intelligent and Scriptural cooperation with the ministry that the Holy Spirit seeks to perform in aiding our rational processes in the first place to strike away from us the proud confidence that we naturally have in our own rational abilities, to resist Scripturally the deceiver Satan, and then to place dependence and confidence in the Holy Spirit Himself to aid in the careful study of the Word.

It should be noted further that the Holy Spirit will not lead contrary to the Word He has inspired. This not only has to do with the extra-scriptural, subjective impressions we might be tempted to entertain that are contrary to the written Word, but also with the interpretations we might be tempted to put upon one portion of Scripture which are contrary to the clear teaching of some other portion. The Holy Spirit in other words, will always be thoroughly consistent with Himself.

On the other hand, it is not only true that the Holy Spirit works in, with and by the Word which He has inspired and will not lead contrary to it, but it is also a principle of considerable importance that He will seek constantly to enlarge the scope of its application to all the affairs of our lives. The Scripture is to become, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the catalyst which pervades all the actions and thoughts of our lives, so that all that we think and do will be both Scriptural and also indicative of the direct and personal leading of the Holy Spirit. The study of

the Bible, when conducted in this way, becomes indeed the pressing search for holiness and sanctification, which is precisely the fulfillment of God's purpose in giving the Word to us. This is what it always ought to be to the child of God.

Two quotations perhaps sum up what we have been saying. The first is a question and answer from the Westminster Longer Catechism (#157):

Q. How is the Word of God to be read?

A. The Holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey, the will of God revealed in them; with diligence and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self denial, and prayer.

And the second is the simple statement of John Calvin's:

"When we are taught to believe in the Holy Spirit, we are also commanded to expect from Him what is said about Him in the Scripture."

We have perhaps developed through this study the following principles which ought to apply when we approach the study of God's Word.

1. We ought to approach the Scripture with a thorough respect for its infallibility and verbal character. In other words we ought to recognize the **AUTHORITY** of the Word of God.
2. We ought to approach the Scripture with a keen consciousness of its **PURPOSE**: to reveal to us a personal God and to bring us into right relationship to Him.
3. We ought to approach the Word of God with a wholesome respect for its inherent **POWER** to build faith or to destroy the rebellious.
4. We ought to come to the Word, never in a purely academic way, but with the underlying determination to progress by its truth in our appropriation of redemption.
5. We ought to approach the Word of God with a conscious choice of our place of death in Jesus Christ, a lack of confidence in our own ability, and a determination to resist Satan the deceiver.
6. We ought to study the Word of God with a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God.

And may it be repeated here solemnly that the minister of the Gospel has a peculiar responsibility to study and understand accurately the truth of God. As a Christian and as a minister, you must realize that God has made provision for an accurate understanding of the basic truth of His Word; that though a severe conflict arises over such an understanding, it is your responsibility for your own sake and for the edifying of the Church of Jesus Christ to come to the place where you can handle the Word of God, not deceitfully, but in manifestation of its truth. The help of the Holy Spirit makes of this, not a burdensome, onerous task, but a very real blessing.