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The Spirit and the Bible - Part 2

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows how that being faithful to the Bible can often result in the church facing opposition, and why we need to be steadfast in our belief in the Scriptures.

Transcript

Don't think of the Bible as just a collection of musty, ancient documents whose real place is in a library. Don't think of these documents of scripture as if they were like fossils whose real place is behind glass in a museum. God speaks through what he has spoken.

The Holy Spirit can speak today through this ancient word as we read it and hear it expound. Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. As the most respected clergyman in the world, according to Billy Graham, and one of the 100 most influential people in the world, according to Time magazine, there has perhaps been no one who has raised the standard of biblical teaching in the 20th century as John Stott.

An extremely humble man known affectionately to many as Uncle John, he was a pastor to pastors and a servant of the Global Church. From his home church of all souls, Langen Place in central London, he preached over 600 sermons. And during this his centenary, we're bringing you some of his very best teaching from nearly 60 years of ministry.

Last week we looked at the importance of the Bible in today's world and how it has impacted society at every level. We saw in particular how the Holy Spirit and the Holy Bible work together, how the Spirit is a searching spirit and a knowing spirit. We also saw that the Spirit has revealed to us the knowledge he has sought out in the Bible.

As John continues this message, you'll find it helpful to have your Bible open to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. The Holy Spirit of God is almost here likened to the divine self-understanding or the divine self-consciousness. And just as nobody can understand a human being except that human being himself, so nobody can understand God except God himself. We sometimes sing in the hymn, "God only knows the love of God." God only knows the wisdom of God.

God only knows the being of God. Now there are two models. You see, two pictures that the apostle uses.

The Spirit searches the depths of God and the Spirit knows the things of God. He's the searching spirit. He is the knowing spirit.

He has an understanding of God which is unique. Now the question is, what has he done with his knowledge? What has he done with what he has searched out and come to know? Has he kept it to himself? No. He has done what only he is competent to do.

He has revealed it. So he come to the second stage from the searching spirit to the revealing spirit. God he alone has come to know.

He alone has made known. Now that has already been stated in verse 10. God has revealed it to us, apostles, Paul and his fellow apostles through the Holy Spirit.

But what he states there, he elaborates now in verse 12. Now we, it's the same apostolic we, the plural of apostolic authority, we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God. This spirit has been given to us.

This knowing spirit, this searching spirit has been given to us in order that we might understand literally what the gracious gifts of God. The things that God has graciously bestowed upon us. Do you see then in verse 12 that God has given the apostles two gifts? One is his grace in salvation, the gracious gifts that God has bestowed, and the second is the Holy Spirit in order that they may understand this gracious salvation.

Now Paul himself is the best example of this double process. You've read his letters, haven't you? You revel in the letters of Paul? I can't understand anybody not enjoying the letters of Paul, that fascinating intellect, that great man of profound emotion and human reality. And as we read the letters of Paul, he gives a superb exposition of the gospel of God's grace.

He tells us what God has done for guilty sinners like us, who are without excuse and deserve nothing at his hand but judgment. He tells us that God sent his son to die for our sins on the cross and to rise again. And that if we are united to Jesus Christ by faith inwardly and baptism outwardly, then we die with Christ and we rise again with Christ and we experience a new life with Christ.

It is a magnificent gospel that he unfolds in his letters, but how does he know it? How does he know all this gospel that he expands? How can he make these comprehensive statements of salvation? Well, the answer is first because he's experienced it. He's experienced the grace of God. He knows it in his own experience, but the other is the Holy Spirit has been given to him to interpret his own experience.

And so the Holy Spirit revealed God's plan of salvation, that what he calls the mystery in

other apostles to him and to his fellow apostles in a unique revelation. The searching spirit became the revealing spirit. Now we're ready for stage three.

The revealing spirit became the inspiring spirit. Look on to verse 13 at the beginning and we impart this. Verse 12 says, "We have received it.

We have received these gracious gifts of God. We have received this spirit to interpret to us what God has done. Now we impart to others what we have received." You see then that the searching spirit who had revealed God's plan of salvation to the apostles went on to communicate this gospel through the apostles to the church.

So just as the Holy Spirit did not keep his researches to himself, said the apostles didn't keep his revelation to themselves. They understood that they were trustees of it. They had to deliver that which they had received, that which they had received.

They now imparted to others and moreover the rest of verse 13 what they imparted, what they communicated in their message was not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Holy Spirit. See how the Holy Spirit is mentioned again, the inspiring spirit. Now here in verse 13 is an unambiguous claim on the part of the apostle Paul to verbal inspiration.

In other words, at the very words with which the apostles clothed this message that had been revealed to them were words taught by the Holy Spirit. I want to say to you if I may that although this is a very unpopular doctrine in the church I know, yet there is no reason to be embarrassed by it, there is no reason to be ashamed of it and there is no reason to be afraid of it. On the contrary it is eminently reasonable because words are the units of which sentences are made up.

Words are the building blocks of speech communication and it is impossible to frame precise sentences without choosing precise words. Think of the trouble you take to compose a cable or telegram. You've only got 12 words or may I forget what it is, maybe it's 20 if you send an overnight cable.

Anyway, you've got a very limited number of words and you are determined to send a message not only which will be understood but which will not be misunderstood. So what trouble you take over your words, you draft it, you draft it again, you redraft it, you scratch out a word there, you add a word there because words matter. My speaker who wants to communicate a message that will be understood and not misunderstood knows the importance of words, you may be surprised that preachers take trouble to prepare their sermons and even choose the words that they are going to use.

You may be surprised I have some written down here in my notes because words matter because I want you to understand what I'm saying and I don't want you to misunderstand it. So I choose my words, every speaker, every preacher, every writer,

whether of letters or of articles or of books knows that words matter. Listen to what Charles Kingsley said in the middle of the last century, these glorious things words.

He says, "Our man's right alone, without words we should know no more of each other's hearts and thoughts than the dog knows of his fellow dog. But if you will consider you always think to yourself in words, though you do not speak them out loud, and without words all our thoughts would be mere blind longings, feelings which we could not understand ourselves. Here we have to clove them in words.

This then is the apostolic claim that the same Holy Spirit of God who searches the depths of God and revealed his researches to the apostles went on to communicate those truths through the apostles in words with which he himself supplied them so that he spoke his words through their words and they were equally the words of God and the words of man which is the double authorship of scripture to which I referred in the first sermon." And this is the meaning of inspiration. Inspiration means God speaking through human beings speaking. Human beings are speaking using their faculties freely, but God is speaking through them in such a way that their words are his words and his words are their words, the inspiring spirit.

But still we haven't finished. We have a fourth stage and that is the enlightening spirit. The rest are verse 13 at the end, the last phrase of verse 13 to verse 16.

See, what about the people who listened to the apostles preaching? What about the people who read the apostles' letters where they left a friend for themselves? Where they left a struggle as best they could to understand the apostolic message? No. The Holy Spirit worked at both ends. The Holy Spirit who was active in the apostles as they spoke and wrote was active in the hearth and the readers as they listened and read.

And that is already implied at the end of verse 13, a complicated phrase that has been variously interpreted. But I take the revised standard version phrase as correct that the Holy Spirit was interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the spirit. So that the hearers and the readers had the Holy Spirit too and he was enlightening their minds to understand that which the apostles were speaking or writing in words that the spirit had given to them.

Now verse 14 and 15 are in stark contrast to each other. Verse 14 begins the unspiritual man or King James Version, the natural man that is the unregenerate person who is not a Christian does this or that. Verse 15, the spiritual man is different.

Paul divides mankind into two clear cut categories, the natural and the spiritual. Those who possess animal or physical life only on the one hand and those who have received spiritual or eternal life on the other. Verse on the one who lack the Holy Spirit because they have never been born again.

There's on the other who have been born again and in whom the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell. And the indwelling Holy Spirit is the distinguishing mark of the true Christian man and woman. Well, what difference does it make to have the Holy Spirit? Well, all the difference in the world.

And in particular here, there are other differences. The Holy Spirit makes a difference to our understanding of spiritual truth. Verse 14, the unspiritual, the unregenerate who hasn't received the Holy Spirit, he doesn't receive the things of the Spirit because they are foolishness to him.

And not any does he not understand them. He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. But verse 15, the spiritual man or woman, the born again Christian in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

That person discerns, it's a great pity in the revised standard version. He puts the word judges because the Greek word is exactly the same as the previous verse discerns. The spiritual man discerns the truth.

He discerns all things. He understands not because he's become omniscient like God, but because all those things to which he was previously blind and which God is revealed in Holy Scripture begin to make sense to him. He discerns what he'd never discern before.

Although he himself is discerned by nobody, he remains an enigma. People don't understand this inner secret of spiritual life and truth that he possesses. Because nobody knows the mind of the Lord, but we have the mind of Christ.

An amazing affirmation. The Holy Spirit illumines our minds, then it is Christ's mind that we now have. The people can't read the mind of Christ, so they can't read our minds either.

So we are an enigma to the non-Christian. Is that your experience? Has the Bible become a new book to you? Grimshaw, you know, one of the great William Grimshaw, the great 18th century evangelical leader, said after his conversion, "If God had drawn up his Bible to heaven and sent me down another, it could not have been newer to me." It was a different book. I could say the same myself.

I read the Bible before I was converted because my mother brought me up to do it, but he was double-dutch to me. And the foggiest idea what he was about. Now I'm not claiming I understood everything.

Of course not. I don't know. But I am saying that when I was born again and the Holy Spirit came to dwell within me, immediately the Bible began to be a new book to me.

I began to understand things I'd never understood before. What a marvelous thing this is. Oh, that we could believe this.

Don't think of the Bible as just a collection of musty ancient documents whose real place is in a library. Don't think of these documents of Scripture as if they were like fossils whose real place is behind glass in a museum. God speaks through what he has spoken.

The Holy Spirit can speak today through this ancient word as we read it and hear it expounded. Let him who has an ear listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying and the present tense through the Scriptures to the churches. Well I'm a stop.

We've seen the Holy Spirit in these four rows, the searching spirit, the revealing spirit, the inspiring spirit, the enlightening spirit. We've seen these four stages. First he searches the depths of God in his ears, the thoughts of God.

Second he revealed his researches to the apostles. Third he communicated them through the apostles in words that he supplied and fourthly he enlightened the minds of the hearers and still does today so that we may discern what he has revealed. Now what's the conclusion? Just a couple of very simple and short truths.

The first concerns are view of the spirit. There's much discussion today about the person and work of the spirit and this passage is only one of many, many passages in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. But let me ask you this.

Is there room in your doctrine of the spirit for this passage? Jesus called the spirit the spirit of truth. He's very, very important to the Holy Spirit. Oh I know he's also the spirit of holiness and the spirit of love and the spirit of power.

But is he to you the spirit of truth? He searches the truth, he reveals the truth, he's inspired the truth, he enlightens our minds to grasp the truth. Their brother insists to never denigrate truth, never disdain theology, never despise your mind. If you do you grieve the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of truth.

This passage should affect our view of the Holy Spirit then next and last our need of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to grow in your knowledge of God? Of course you do. You want to grow in your knowledge of the truth? Of course you do.

Do you want to grow in your understanding of the wisdom of God and of the totality of his purpose to make us one day like Christ in glory? Of course you do. So do I. Then we need the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth to illumine our minds. For that we need to be born again.

I sometimes wonder if the reason why these way out theologians today are speaking and writing if I may say such rubbish is because they've never been born again. It's possible to be a theologian and unregenerate. Is that why they don't discern these marvelous truths of Scripture? Scripture is spiritually discerned.

Now we need to come to the Scriptures humbly and reverently and expectantly. We

need to acknowledge that the truths revealed in the Bible are still sealed and still locked unless the Holy Spirit opens them to us and opens our minds to them. The God hides them from the wise and clever and reveals them to babies who are humble in their reverent approach to him.

So pray for the illumination of the Spirit. Before we preach us prepare. We pray.

Before the congregation listen, they should pray. Before the fellowship group turns to its Bible study, they should pray. Before the individual believer begins his daily reading of Scripture, he should pray.

Listen my eyes that I may behold wonderful things in your word. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you for your spirit.

Grant that we may never separate the word from the Spirit or the Spirit from the word. Grant that this searching, revealing, inspiring Spirit may also be to us the illumining Spirit enlightening our eyes to understand. For the glory of your name we pray.

Amen. You've been listening to the conclusion of the message by John Stott on the Spirit and the Bible and how we need the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to us in all the Scriptures. This sermon is one of a series of messages that John Stott preached at all souls church on why the Bible is a book for today and you can hear the rest by going to their website.

John Stott wrote some 50 books in his lifetime including one on today's subject entitled Understanding the Bible. You can also watch videos of John Stott preaching from around the world by visiting premierchristinradio.com/JohnStott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing touching every level of society across the world. Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries John Stott founded go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

[Music]

(buzzing)