

# OpenTheo

## The Spirit and the Bible - Part 1

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### The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott explains how the Bible came into existence and how God spoke to individual writers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. John Stott shows why the Holy Bible and the Holy Spirit are inseparable.

### Transcript

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. Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott.

The 20th century gave us a number of great evangelical Bible teachers, and for many, John Stott stood above them all. Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stott. When a TV reporter once asked him, "You've had a brilliant academic career at First of Cambridge, rector at 29, chaplain to the Queen," what's your ambition now, John replied, "to be more like Jesus?" It was Jesus Christ that he made preeminent in all his teaching.

Whenever he preached his home church of all souls, Langham Place, it was packed, and people even sat on the stairs. During John Stott's centenary, we are bringing you some of his finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry. The Bible is the believer's handbook for life, the toolkit for Christian living, and the best-selling book in the world.

It's impossible to imagine Christianity without the Bible, and there is surely no other book that has made such a global impact. But many would question its relevance to a modern society like ours, and whether it's a book for today. We call it the Holy Bible, and we talk about the Holy Spirit, and today John Stott shows us the connection between the two.

All of us know that the Holy Bible and the Holy Spirit are supposed to have something to do with one another. Most of us, I hope, believe, at least in some terms, that the Holy Bible is the creative product of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we say the Nicene Creed, we

affirm as one of our main beliefs about the Holy Spirit that He spoke through the prophets.

This occurs many similar phrases that come in the New Testament as when our Lord Jesus Himself said on one occasion, "David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared," and then he quoted from Psalm 110. The Apostle Peter in his second letter says, "The Holy Men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Or is the Greek phrase literally means that they were carried along as by wind by the Holy Spirit. So there is some connection between Bible and Spirit, and what that connection is, we're going to seek to discover this morning.

Two weeks ago we began with the topic God and the Bible, and we considered that God is the author of the revelation that He has given. Last week, our topic was Christ and the Bible, and we saw that Jesus Christ is the subject of the revelation, so that if God has spoken, it is supremely about Jesus Christ that He has spoken. Today we complete the Trinitarian statement with the Holy Spirit and the Bible, and consider that the Spirit is the agent of the revelation of which God is the author, and Christ is the subject.

So the Christian understanding of the Bible is essentially a Trinitarian understanding. The Bible comes from God, focuses on Christ, and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The best definition of the Bible is a Trinitarian definition.

The Bible is the witness of the Father concerning the Son through the Holy Spirit, and we don't understand the Bible if we don't understand the Trinity. The Bible is a Trinitarian book. So the question before us this morning is precisely what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of revelation.

To answer that question, we turn to the Bible itself, and I will be grateful if you would open your Bible in the New Testament section. The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians and the second chapter. Now it's very important that we see every text in its context, and it's certainly important with regard to our text today.

So let me remind you of what Paul has been talking about in Corinthians so far. At this point he's been emphasizing the foolishness of the gospel. Chapter 1 verse 18, he says the word of the cross is folly.

Today's we're perishing. Chapter 1 verse 23, he says, "We preach Christ crucified, stumbling block to Jews and foolishness." The message of the cross is stupid. It's foolishness to the secular intellectual.

But having concentrated on the folly of the gospel, Paul now adds an important corrective. Last his reader should imagine that he is repudiating wisdom altogether, that he is glorying in foolishness, and that he is anti-intellectual. So he begins in our text verse 6, "But among the mature we do impart wisdom." Our message is not only the

foolishness of the cross, it has wisdom as well.

Of course we preach it among the mature, not among non-Christians, not among young Christians, but the mature. And we impart wisdom, not the world's wisdom, but God's wisdom. And this wisdom of God is his purpose.

He goes on to say at the end of verse 7 for our glorification. That is the wisdom of God concerns the purpose of God to bring his children to glory. When one day we shall share the glory of God and be marvelously transformed.

Now that is the wisdom of God, this full purpose of God. So in evangelizing non-Christians we concentrate on the foolishness of the cross. But in building our Christians into maturity, we seek to lead them into an understanding of the total purpose of God.

And Paul calls this in verse 7, "The secret and hidden wisdom of God," meaning that it can be known only by revelation. And at the end of verse 9, he calls it what God has prepared for those who love him. Now his point in this is that this wisdom of God, this totality of the purpose of God, to bring us to this ultimate perfection and sharing his glory, this wisdom of God can be known only by revelation.

It's no other way to note. By saying, "The rulers of this world don't know it. They don't know it today.

There are many rulers of this nation, rulers of the nations of the world who haven't the foggiest notion about this wisdom of God. They are blind to it. They don't know it.

The rulers of this age don't know it. If they had known it in the time of Jesus, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. And the fact that they hounded him to his death and would do so again today if he were here shows that they are blind, ignorant of the wisdom of God.

But these rulers are not exceptional. All human beings by themselves are ignorant of the wisdom of God." Look again at verse 9, if you kindly will, God's purpose, he says, "There is something that what no eye has seen. It's invisible to the naked eye.

No ear has heard. It's inaudible. And no heart or imagination has conceived it.

It's inconceivable. It's beyond the reach of human eyes and ears and minds. It's not amenable to scientific investigation.

It's not even amenable to poetic imagination. It is altogether beyond our little finite minds unless God should reveal it. And Paul goes on, "He has done." Verse 10, "That is what no eye has seen or ear heard or imagination conceived.

That God is prepared for those who love him. The unimaginable splendor of his person and purpose. God has revealed it to us by his spirit." Now that us in the Greek word is

emphatic.

In the context, it's quite clear. It doesn't mean to all of us. The us here is the apostle Paul, who is writing and his fellow apostles.

And as we go on to consider the text, that will become abundantly clear. God had made a particular revelation of these truths that the rulers of this age didn't know about and had revealed it to special organs of revelation. Prophets in the Old Testament, apostles in the New Testament.

And he has revealed it to us. Paul says, "Through the Holy Spirit." He is the agent of this revelation. Now all that is, rather, I'm afraid a lengthy introduction.

But we had to see the context within which he comes to the notion of the Holy Spirit as the agent of revelation. Then in what he goes on to write, it really is the most marvelously comprehensive statement. He tells us the stages of this revelation, the stages and the Holy Spirit's work as the agent of revelation.

First, he is the searching spirit. Incidentally, just in passing, there shows that the Holy Spirit is personal. I hope all of us have got used to referring to the Holy Spirit as he and have grown out of referring to the Holy Spirit as it.

The Holy Spirit is not an it. The Holy Spirit is a he. And you can tell that because he searches.

Some of you are involved in postgraduate research. And you will agree with me that you can't do research unless you are a person. The Holy Spirit is a researcher.

You cannot do that searching unless he is fully personal. He has a mind with which he thinks and searches. Paul uses two very fascinating little pictures to indicate the qualifications of the Holy Spirit in revelation.

First, then, he says he searches everything even the depths of God. The Holy Spirit is depicted as a restlessly inquisitive research worker. He researches into the deep things of God.

A phrase very popular among the gnostics of those days. And Paul may take it up from their vocabulary. He may be likening the Holy Spirit even to a deep sea diver who is seeking to fathom the deepest depths of the unfathomable being of Almighty God.

For God's being is infinite in its profundity. And Paul boldly declares that the Spirit of God is searching the depths of God. In other words, God himself is exploring the riches of his own being.

The Spirit of God searching the deep things of God. Then the other picture that Paul gives here is taken from human self-understanding. He goes on in verse 11, "What man,

what human being, knows in the Greek it isn't the thoughts.

Actually, it's the things of a human being, except the Spirit of the man who is in him." That is an ant, cannot conceivably imagine what it's like to be a human being. Nor can a frog, nor can a rabbit, nor even can an ape who is supposed to be the most intelligent primary, apart from human beings, nor even can one human being understand another human being. How often we say, particularly maybe in adolescence as we're growing up, nobody understands me.

You just don't understand. It's true, nobody does understand me, except myself. And even my understanding of myself is limited, and nobody understands you, except yourself.

There is a certain self-understanding or self-consciousness or self-identity. And Paul uses this with regard to the Holy Spirit. He says, "Just so nobody comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God." 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." And if 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 is he done with his knowledge?" What is 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 we come to the second stage from the searching Spirit to the revealing Spirit.

What 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, all in 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 is 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, he answers 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've 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. Every 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 books knows that words matter. The inspiring spirit, the imparting spirit, the Bible and the spirit are truly inseparable. You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Storton, the spirit and the Bible which he'll conclude next week.

This sermon is one of the series of messages that John stopped preached at all Souls Church or why the Bible is a book for today and you can hear the rest by visiting their website. John Stort rates some 50 books in his lifetime including one of them today's subject entitled "Understanding the Bible." You can also watch videos of John Stort preaching from around the world by visiting [premierchristenradio.com/JohnStort](http://premierchristenradio.com/JohnStort). The legacy of John Stort 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 Stort who donated all his book world is to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries John Storte founded go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStorte](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStorte). Join us at the same time next week for more from the Bible for today with John Storte.

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