

Hermeneutics

Week 7 – The Role of the Holy Spirit

Introduction: We have spent several weeks talking about the mechanics of Bible interpretation, and now we aim to address one of the most important aspects of the interpretive topic: the role of the Holy Spirit.

- I. The Need for the Holy Spirit
 1. The Divine Author
 - A. If the word is the Word of God, it would claim to be so.
 - i. Jesus referenced the Old Testament as every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

† **Matthew 4:4** – *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*
 - ii. In the New Testament, the term Scripture is one of the more common designations for the word of God.

† **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*
 - iii. The Holy Ghost moved men to speak God’s words.

† **2 Peter 1:19-21** – *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:²⁰ Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.²¹ For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

† **Acts 28:25** – *...Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers*

† **Mark 12:36** – *For David himself said by the Holy Ghost...*
 - iv. Paul credits the Thessalonian church as obeying the word of the New Testament books, as it is the word of God.

† **1 Thess. 2:13** – *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*
 - B. According to the greatest passage in the Bible about itself, Psalm 119, the author indicates that the fear, the statutes, the commandments, the law, the testimonies, the precepts, the judgments, the word, in general, are all the LORD’s.
 2. The Divine Teacher, Interpreter, and Enabler
 - A. Being that the Spirit of God is credited with authoring the word who could be the better interpreter.

- † **John 16:13** – *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*
- B.** That said, if the test for false prophets and false prophecy as given in the Old Testament is to be the standard for discerning prophecy, it is also the right way to understand the scriptures.
- i. It doesn't turn people to follow false gods.
 - ii. It is in line with previously revealed scripture.
 - iii. It would make sense that if the same author inspired all of it, then they would interconnect in doctrine and seek the worship of the same deity.
 - iv. Walter Kaiser, Said it this way, "The Bible is not a potpourri of disconnected readings, canonical or otherwise. The Bible does exhibit strong connections and connectors with all of its parts. To separate the Law from the Prophets and the Writings or the Gospels and Epistles is to set apart what God has joined together by his Holy Spirit. The parts are best understood in light of the building of the whole plan of the history of salvation."¹
- C.** It requires new life from the spirit to truly grasp God's word.
- i. "No one can fully comprehend the meaning of the Bible unless he is regenerate. The unsaved person is spiritually blind (2 Cor. 4:4) and dead (Eph. 2:2)."²
 - ii. "As Martin Luther once said, the unregenerate can understand the grammar of John 3:16, but they do not act on those facts. It is in this sense that they are unable to know the things of the Spirit of God."³
 - iii. "First Corinthians 2:14 also states that the unsaved do not "understand spiritual things." The Greek word *ginōskō* ("to understand") does not mean comprehend intellectually; it means know by experience. The unsaved obviously do not experience God's Word because they do not welcome it. Only the regenerate have the capacity to welcome and experience the Scriptures, by means of the Holy Spirit"⁴
 - The common term hear in the Old Testament was essentially hear that you may obey.
- D.** A true relationship with God through the spirit is only the beginning aspects of rightly interpreting God's word.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "How Do the Parts Fit the Whole?: The Tool of Biblical Theology," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 74.

² Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 22.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Ibid., 23.

- i. “Also reverence for and interest in God and His Word are essential to interpreting the Bible properly.”⁵
- ii. “Other spiritual qualifications are a prayerful attitude and humility”⁶ Both of which the Spirit stirs up in us.
- iii. “The Scriptures should also be approached with a willingness to obey them, a willingness to put into practice what has been learned in the Word.”⁷
 - † **Matthew 7:24** – *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*
- iv. Study is also required.
 - 1) “Some rationalize their poor preparation with pious talk about “inspiration” and “just letting the Spirit speak.” The fact is that God has decided to use preachers. Our laziness does not help the Holy Spirit; it hinders him. There is nothing particularly spiritual about poor sermon preparation.”⁸
 - 2) In the same way that the spirit can only bring back to mind things you have already learned, we cannot expect to extemporaneously to just get immense insight in the moment we get up to speak having never learned of God and his word.
- v. Right interpretation can be tempered by other believers who also have the spirit.
 - 1) C. H. Spurgeon (1834–92), England’s best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, countered such pretension with some advice to budding preachers in “A Chat about Commentaries”
 - 2) “Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think of ways that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.”⁹

⁵ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 23.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 219.

⁹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 206–207.

- † **Eph. 4:11-12** – *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*
- 3) If having the Spirit personally was sufficient, there would be no need for teachers to edify the body.
 - 4) If having the spirit was sufficient, Jesus had no need to disciple anyone because they would just supernaturally understand all things and have the right motives and actions.
 - 5) The same would be true of the Apostles to the future generations.
- vi. This safety amongst many counselors (**Prov. 11:14**) can be seen by believers not just in our local assemblies, creating echo chambers, but men even at times across denominations and across time.
- II. The Need for Hermeneutics, even though we have the Spirit
1. The Presence of the Spirit does not nullify Human Responsibility.
 - A. Even people with the Spirit make bonehead decisions.
 - i. Sampson had the spirit of God upon him, but his living in opposition to God’s revealed word led him into trouble.
 - ii. Jephthah foolishly promised God a sacrifice while having the Spirit and it ended up being the cost of his own daughter.
 - iii. Saul had the Spirit upon him and wrongly interpreted God’s command to kill the Amalekites completely.
 - iv. Peter had the indwelling Spirit and found himself acting and responding in ways which confused people in relation to the Gospel. (Galatians 1)
 - B. The rest of the Christian life seems to interact and grow through a unification of plan, purpose, and action.
 - i. In other words, growth occurs when we do what has been revealed and God works in us to grow us while we obey.
 - ii. Sometimes we are so diametrically opposed to something that God wants us to do that he gets our attention through difficulty. So that we can learn, obey, and grow.
 - iii. Duvall and Hays give this illustration. “When children learn to walk, they usually want their parents involved in the experience. Usually the parents will sit a few feet apart facing each other, and one parent will point the wobbly child in the direction of the outstretched arms of the other parent. After playing “catch” with the child for a few days, the child finally gets the hang of it and begins to walk on his or her own. For the sake of illustration, what if the child thought, *Since my parents are here, I don’t have to do anything. I don’t have to move one foot in front of the other or stumble backward or fall down. I can stop trying to walk. With Mom and Dad close by, walking will come automatically.*”¹⁰
 2. How does the Spirit interact with the interpreter?

¹⁰ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 231–232.

- A.** *The Spirit does not create new meaning or provide new information.* The canon of Scripture is closed. This means that we should not expect the Spirit to add another book to the Bible or anything new to the sixty-six books we have. The Spirit does not provide new revelation on a par with Scripture, but he does give us a deeper understanding of the truth that is already there¹¹
- For example, “The Spirit does not bypass the normal human processes of communication, enabling us to claim that “For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son” really means, “Give me all your money, preferably in fresh \$100 bills!”¹²
- B.** *We can rely on the Spirit to help us grasp the meaning of God’s Word.* The Spirit and the Word work together. The Spirit enables us to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures at a deeper level. Certainly this includes the ability to apply the meaning of the Bible, but it also includes the ability to discern the theology of a passage (what we refer to as “theological principles”). The Spirit gives us “ears to hear” what God is saying to us in his Word.”¹³
- C.** “We are tempted to adjust the meaning of a passage to fit our situation, our purposes, or our feelings. We may even find ourselves ignoring or violating context as we desperately search for a biblical connection to our situation. It is especially easy for new believers to confuse their own feelings with the voice of the Holy Spirit. But we cannot expect the Spirit to change the meaning of the Bible to correspond to our feelings. (The Spirit always agrees with himself.) The Spirit does, however, work with the Word to transform the life of the interpreter.”¹⁴
- D.** “Vanhoozer sees three ways in which the Spirit works in the life of the Christian interpreter. (i) The Spirit convicts us that the Bible is divinely inspired. We come to believe that the Bible is God’s Word because of the work of the Holy Spirit. (ii) The Spirit works in our minds to impress on us the full meaning of the Scriptures (see [2] above). We come to understand that a command really is a command, a promise is a promise, and so on, and we are empowered to grasp the importance of each. (iii) The Spirit works in our hearts so that we are able to receive the Word of God (application).”¹⁵
- E.** “If we as teachers and pastors are committed to letting the Spirit bring change based on the passages we are studying, we will not have to rely on the snazziest movie clips, the most relevant songs, or the best stories to use as illustrations.

¹¹ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 232.

¹² Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 267.

¹³ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 232-233.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

While these tools can help reinforce the text's main points, the greatest transformation in others' lives will come from our willingness to show them how a given passage applies in our own lives, how we have allowed the Spirit to help us model effective application, and how important we recognize the application is, as the Spirit has touched both our heads and our hearts."¹⁶

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit luckily is not only teaching us when we are in an in depth study of the scripture but is teaching us through devotional reading, prayer and even just at times through the circumstances of our daily lives. In short, we can grow in our knowledge and application of scripture through careful interpretive work, seeking the assistance of the Spirit, and doing so with the intention of knowing and following the Lord more along the way.

¹⁶ Blomberg and Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 267.

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