

WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Jesus never wrote a book or even a letter. All of His teachings are recorded by others on His behalf.

However, there are seven letters that He dictated, to be delivered to seven churches in what is now western Turkey. And each letter contains this closing admonition:

Revelation 2:7

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”
(See also Revelation 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22.)

The imperative tone is clear: *must* listen.

NET: *“...had better hear...”*

AMP: *“...give heed...”*

NCV: *“Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Notice, He said, “to the churches” (plural). Each church received a message unique to its circumstance, but these were but a part of a larger message that was for them *all*, as John (the letter’s scribe) noted in his introduction: *“This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia.”* (Revelation 1:4)

Messages to the Churches

What *does* the Spirit say to the churches?

To each one individually, He sends a word of insightful encouragement.

To Ephesus: *“Turn back to Me.”*

To Smyrna: *“Remain faithful.”*

To Pergamum: *“Don’t tolerate sin, repent of it.”*

To Thyatira: *“Obey Me to the end.”*

To Sardis: *“Wake up and turn to Me.”*

To Philadelphia: *“Persevere!”*

To Laodicea: *“Hear My voice; let us eat together as friends.”*

To the seven overall He sends a message that foreshadows coming events, some of them dreadful enough to make a grown man pray for death to come quickly, but others glorious enough to make those who believe hold on to the end. This message is the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world as King of kings and Lord of lords, who was, and is, and is to come.

At the very heart of this is the simple but wonderful fact that the Spirit of God has something to say to which we *must* listen.

John, the apostle, was very aware of this. He alone recorded some of Jesus' teaching about the One who was to come in His name, the Holy Spirit. What he wrote made clear that the Spirit's ministry of speaking to the churches was ongoing.

Messages to His People

In preparation for this message I briefly reviewed the Book of Acts to find those times when the Spirit expressly spoke to individuals or groups of people. Here are six specific occasions. See if you can pick up the recurrent theme.

To Phillip, "Go south..." (Acts 8:26).

Again, to Phillip, "Go over to that carriage..." (Acts 8:29).

To Peter, "Go over to Straight Street..." (Acts 9:11).

To Ananias, "Go (find Saul)..." (Acts 9:15).

Later to Peter, "Go downstairs..." (Acts 10:20).

To Paul, "Go... to the Gentiles..." (Acts 22:21).

Did you catch that? What are you hearing the Spirit say? Would you agree that the Spirit is frequently and repeatedly telling us to "go"?!

This reminds me of what Jesus said, just before He returned to His Father: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.*" The Holy Spirit wants to put you together with people who need to know more about Jesus Christ. He will also tell you to "go" if you are listening.

So, here's a lesson for all of us, especially the men: don't hesitate to ask for directions! The Holy Spirit has come to be our Guide.

Some people are even formally ordained to this work by the Spirit and the Church:

Acts 13:2

One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them."³ So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

However, I don't want you to get the impression that "Go" is the *only* message the Holy Spirit has to bring. Clearly, it is a fundamental directive, but He has much, much more to say also.

The Voice of Jesus

John 14:26

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

Everything Jesus has told us! He will teach *and* remind you. If you give Him your ear, He will keep you in the loop.

John 16:15

"The Spirit will tell you whatever He receives from Me."

This point deserves further explanation. First, Jesus said, *“The Spirit will tell you whatever He receives from Me.”* The Holy Spirit has nothing to say apart from Jesus Christ. Everything He has to say perfectly represents the Son of God. *Whatever* Jesus gives Him to say, He will communicate.

Second, He said, *“The Spirit will tell you.”* While the Spirit continues to address whole congregations, as well as the whole church of Jesus Christ on the earth, He also has something extremely important to say to *each one of you*. Our God knows you by name. Your life is significant to Him and He has much to say *to you* about it. The Holy Spirit is the voice of God to you.

Through the Book

He speaks in many ways, but primarily He speaks through the reading of the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

The Holy Spirit is the *author* of the Scriptures. That’s why we call the Bible “God’s Word.”

Therefore, He is also the appropriate *interpreter* of the Scriptures. No one else can explain the meaning and purpose of a document like its author.

2 Peter 1 (ESV)

²⁰ No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also the best *applicator* of the Word. If you want to know how to apply God’s Word, ask the Spirit to guide you.

James 1:5

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

Giving Life

The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to teach us, awaken us, correct us, and train us. And all of this is so that we may *live well*. Jesus said, “I have come to give you life, fullness of life.”

The Bible conveys to us the words of God. By the Spirit’s application, those words are life-giving.

True, the Word is a hammer, to crush self-will and pride. But a hammer may be wielded by a miner or by a jeweler, and the results will be strikingly different. One will pulverize rock into gravel; the other will chisel a gemstone. The Holy Spirit knows just *how and when* to apply God’s Word to our hearts. Follow His direction.

True, the Word is a fire, to burn away the dross and ignite a holy fire within us. But fire may be used by an arsonist or a welder. In the hands of an arsonist, fire can destroy what we would prefer to preserve; in the hands of a welder, fire can craft works of industry or art. The Holy Spirit has the skill to use God’s Word to build lives. Let Him guide.

The Heart of Covenant

The Scriptures were not given in a vacuum. They were never intended to be used at will by random people who were not personally acquainted with their Author. They were designed to bring people into the presence of the living God and into continuing relationship with Him. Tragically, some people resist that relationship (or never discover it), and therefore twist God's words into instruments of control or relegate them to the status of myth.

2 Corinthians 3:6

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The New Testament should never be studied or understood or applied apart from the inspired guidance of the Holy Spirit. Without His help, the very same words that were meant to give life can bring death and destruction.

Doubtless, you have been the intended recipient of such a life-sucking, bondage-making message at some time in your life. If received, it causes one's spirit to shrivel and hope to vanish.

But the bondage-breaking, life-bringing voice of the Holy Spirit causes one's spirit to soar and one's hope to rise, even from the ashes of defeat.

David, the warrior-king, exclaimed, *"In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall!"* (Psalm 18:29)

Fellowship, the Aim

1 John 2

²⁶ *I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray. ²⁷ But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.*

The words of the Holy Spirit will sustain your fellowship with Jesus. They will never lead you to depend on yourself or someone or something else; they will always enhance your dependence on Him.

Speak the Word

Jesus only spoke what the Father told Him to say. The Holy Spirit only speaks what Jesus tells Him to say. Now, it is your turn. Learn to speak only what the Holy Spirit gives you to speak. Sometimes, that means speaking up when you feel timid; other times, it means holding your tongue when you have much to say.

And as you learn to bridle your tongue in this way, the rest of your life will come under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit (James 3:1).

It is no wonder, then, that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is initially evidenced by the new ability to speak in unlearned languages of the Spirit. If God has a means of directing your tongue (your words), He can influence every other area of your life. For the tongue wields the power of death or life (Proverbs 18:21).

So, the sum of this is that we *must* listen to what the Spirit says. We must learn to recognize and respond to His voice.

He will teach us what is true; He will remind us of all that Jesus has said; He will guide us to do what God wants, especially to tell others about Jesus. And He will prepare us for things that are to come. He is “a Friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Listen to Him. Make His words your close companions.