

WHEN THE SPIRIT SPEAKS

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Notice, the title of this message is in the present tense. That's because the Spirit of God still speaks to people today!

My first encounter with the Holy Spirit was when I began reading the Bible to discover what God had to say (a lot!). He would highlight a word or a phrase or a passage for me, directing my attention to it. I usually didn't know what to make of it, but somehow it impressed me deeply. Often, I would pause and close my eyes, as if trying to see inside the words to understand why He was emphasizing them for me. Sometimes, He showed me; other times, I just tucked them away, to return to them later, as I continued seeking His wisdom.

The Bible begins with these words:

Genesis 1

¹ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

³ *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Within the first three verses, God had begun to speak.

Hebrews 1

¹ *In days gone by, God spoke in many and varied ways to the Fathers through the prophets. ² But now, in the final days (what the ancient Hebrew writers called *acharit-hayamim*, literally: the end of days) he has spoken to us through his Son, to whom he has given ownership of everything and through whom he created the universe.*

Clearly, He hasn't stopped speaking, but He now speaks in the ultimate context of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

⁷ *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 2)*

The real issue is not whether or not the Spirit speaks, but whether or not we are in a frame of mind to hear Him.

One of the few times the Father's voice was recorded in the New Testament, He announced to the three disciples on the mountaintop where Jesus was transfigured, *"This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him"* ().

The psalmist sang these words:

³ *Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me. Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live. (Psalm 43)*

Light and truth work together to guide our steps. The Spirit of Light and the Spirit of Truth are one and the same: the Holy Spirit.

¹³ *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard.* (John 16)

The Holy Spirit does not bring “new information.” He guides us into the truth that already exists; what God has already spoken.

There are four purposes for the Spirit’s communications with us:

- Illumination (discovery of truth)
- Interpretation (meaning of truth)
- Application (usage of truth)
- Confirmation (assurance of truth)

Illumination

Illumination is the discovery of truth. It is not simple brightness alone, but *defined* brightness.

If we read beyond the opening words of Genesis, we will find this kind of definition.

³ *Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.* (Genesis 1)

God made light, then He harnessed light to define a day.

So, also, when God illumines the human heart, it may begin as a glow, but if we attend to it, it will be defined (harnessed) by Scripture to bring clarity. We should seek this kind of clarity. This is how the Holy Spirit guides us into truth.

Many who have tasted death and lived to tell about it have spoken of seeing a brilliant light, but those who knew Jesus Christ did not only see light... they saw clearly, they saw the Lord, and their loved ones, and heavenly beings around the Throne.

The Spirit gave this kind of illumination to a group in the ancient church of Antioch, who were seeking the Lord.

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.”*(Acts 13)

The Holy Spirit had a special and specific work for Paul and Barnabas to do. As these believers waited on God in worship the Holy Spirit spoke to them; He illuminated the task He had prepared. He urged them to step into it.

He will bring similar definition to His purpose for you, if you will wait upon Him in worship. That is, if you will give yourself to trusting Him and magnifying Him—where you are—He will lead you to where He wants you to be and what He wants you to do.

Interpretation

Interpretation gives the meaning of truth. Unless the Spirit provides the interpretation, truth will slip right past us.

⁵⁴ *Then Jesus turned to the crowd and said, “When you see clouds beginning to form in the west, you say, ‘Here comes a shower.’ And you are right. ⁵⁵ When the south wind blows, you say, ‘Today will be a scorcher.’ And it is. ⁵⁶ You fools! You know how to interpret the weather signs of the earth and sky, but you don’t know how to interpret the present times. (Luke 12)*

Merely observing things is insufficient; we need to understand what we observe.

A traffic light has three colors—red, yellow, and green. One of them is always lighted; we must know what each one means (or it will cost us).

You cannot correctly interpret the present times simply by observing events. You must overlay them with the words of God—the Scriptures—to discover what they mean. Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding.

If someone delivers a message in an unknown language, prompted by the Holy Spirit, it may seem impressive, but it accomplishes nothing more, unless there is also an interpretation, as Paul wrote.

¹⁰ *Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. (1 Corinthians 12)*

Without the interpretation, all we hear is sounds; with an interpretation, we may understand what the Spirit intended.

Yet, understanding meaning does not necessarily give direction.

²² *“And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don’t know what awaits me, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. ²⁴ But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. (Acts 20)*

Paul had an understanding, for the Spirit interpreted for him what lay ahead. But He did not yet have direction—“I don’t know what awaits me.” He had some light, but without specific direction to the contrary, he determined to keep pursuing the path the Lord had already set before him. Difficulty or pain is information that prepares; not information that directs. Keep doing what He already told you to do, until He tells you something different.

Application

Application is how we put the truth to use.

Listen to these three proverbs...

Proverbs 2

² *Apply your heart to understanding.*

Proverbs 22

¹⁷ *Apply your heart to my knowledge.*

Proverbs 23

¹² *Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge.*

The Spirit tells us *what to do* with what we learn. That is application. You must give your heart to know this. Without it, all you have is head knowledge.

God's words are not intended merely to inform us, but to direct our choices and our actions. It is the Holy Spirit who shows us how to apply God's words.

In a story about Philip, one of the first deacons of the early church, we may see how the Spirit helped Philip to apply God's prompting, and how Philip helped another to act on (apply) the Scriptures.

²⁶ *As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza."*²⁷ *So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

(Philip observed the carriage, but the Holy Spirit wanted him to do something about it.)

²⁹ *The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."*

³⁰ *Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"*

³¹ *The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.*

³² *The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:*

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

³³ *He was humiliated and received no justice.*

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ *The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?"³⁵ So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. (Acts 8)*

Many people imagine that life's objective is to discover what is true. It is not. Adopting the right statement of beliefs is not helpful, if we stop there. The Bible warns of those who are *"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Timothy 3:7).

Head knowledge does not equal heart knowledge; heart knowledge only comes by applying what we know in real life circumstances—that is *practicing* the truth. Don't be content, as too many are, to simply know truths. Find out from the Spirit, through the Scriptures, how to put them into practice.

Confirmation

Confirmation is the assurance of truth.

Peter fell into a trance one afternoon and had an amazing vision—a clear vision—from God. He saw it three times, so it was very clear, but he was puzzled by it. What did it mean? And what was he to do about it?

¹⁹ Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three men have come looking for you. ²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don’t worry, for I have sent them.” (Acts 10)

The Holy Spirit gave Peter direction. Here’s the equation: a vision + 3 men = a journey. When Peter followed the Spirit’s leading, the light he had received grew brighter.

²¹ So Peter went down and said, “I’m the man you are looking for. Why have you come?”

²² They said, “We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message.”

²³ So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa.

²⁴ They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter pulled him up and said, “Stand up! I’m a human being just like you!” ²⁷ So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled.

²⁸ Peter told them, “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean. ²⁹ So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me.” (Acts 10)

Cornelius explained that an angel had instructed him to send for Peter, and told him exactly where Peter was staying. “So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you” (Acts 10:33).

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35) Peter now had the full interpretation of the vision—it had come in stages, as he obeyed the Spirit’s leading. He could now apply the vision by sharing the Good News message of Jesus with Cornelius’ household.

Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked, “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” (Acts 10:44-47)

After Peter applied the principle of the vision the Spirit had given him, the Spirit confirmed the truth, as the entire household put their trust in Jesus and were baptized in the Holy Spirit, evidenced by their speaking in tongues (unknown languages).

The Holy Spirit illuminated truth in a vision, and directed Peter to move forward. As Peter did so, the Spirit also gave the interpretation. When Peter applied the meaning by obediently sharing the Good News, the Spirit confirmed His original purpose, filling their hearts with wonder and praise.

Aren’t you glad that the Spirit still speaks today?

And when we mix faith with His words to us, awesome things take place!

May God give you ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches today.

Questions to Consider

Do you believe the Holy Spirit still speaks today? Do you believe He will speak to you?

Do you have ears to hear? "Ears to hear" is a way of describing a desire to hear, coupled with a readiness to obey. Will you pledge to obey what you hear from God? If you are not yet ready to obey, you are far less likely to hear from Him.

Do you have the Spirit's interpretation (meaning) of what you have heard?

Do you know how to apply (how to use) what you have heard? Have you done so?

Have you received confirmation (assurance) of the what the Spirit said to you? If you have obeyed His direction, you may expect the confirmation, even if it is delayed.