

The Spirit of Truth

John 14:16-18, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, Ephesians 3:16-19, Colossians 1:9, Romans 15:13

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What distinguishes us from the people we meet every day who aren't followers of Jesus?

People we say hello to when we're getting coffee at Starbucks?
People we meet when we're taking a walk? People who sit next to us at high school football games?

What makes us different? Are we smarter or more capable than they are? Probably not. Are we nicer, or more generous? Not necessarily. In fact, Paul says the opposite.

1 Corinthians 1:26, *"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."*

There's nothing unique about normal, ordinary people and the same is true of us. On the surface, we look like everyone else.

What makes us different is something deeper and more profound. What makes us different is that we have a supernatural power.

That's not to be confused with a superpower. We're not faster than a speeding bullet, or more powerful than a locomotive. What we have is something better than a superpower.

We have a power that comes from the Spirit of God which lives in each of us. That power is what makes our day-to-day experiences different than the life experience of those who don't know Christ.

My goal, throughout this series, is to help us to understand this power, so we can experience all that God has for us as His children.

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So, as we study the power of the Holy Spirit, we must understand that it isn't an independent spiritual force that we believe we can manipulate, like you find in some Eastern religions.

This Spirit isn't some mysterious power; it's simply the person of the Holy Spirit acting in and through us.

There are several ways in which the Holy Spirit empowers us to know God, and to live lives that are honoring and pleasing to Him.

First, He leads us into truth and protects us against falsehood, especially with regards to the truth about Jesus Christ and salvation.

John 14:16-18, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Here, we see that the Holy Spirit is called "*the Spirit of truth.*" What this means is that truth is an essential aspect of His character. There is no falsehood in Him.

There are no contradictions, no deceptions, no gray areas. He is true in every respect.

This may be difficult for us to fully accept, because we're so accustomed to treating everything we see and hear with skepticism.

Why? Because of this world in which we live, we can't take at face value everything we read online, see on television or what we're told by other people. We must constantly ask, "*Is that really true?*"

But when it comes to what the Spirit has given us in the Word of God, we can trust it completely. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Jesus said, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" He Himself is the Truth.

Second, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth because He reveals the truth about Jesus to us.

Verse 17, in the passage we just read, tells us that in the past He was "*with*" God's people—meaning that He provided revelation and guidance to them, but from an external perspective.

He was working from the outside in, through their eyes and ears; through their senses. However, in this present age, ever since the day of Pentecost, He's not only "*with*" us, He's "*in*" us.

He indwells us; He inhabits every part of us—our mind, our emotions and our will.

Another way of saying this is that, if you're a follower of Christ, there's no aspect of who you are that's untouched by the Holy Spirit.

That's how He's able to lead us into the truth more fully. He's no longer working from the outside in but working from the inside out.

Let me give you an analogy. When a musician is learning a song, they have the words, the notes and the chords on a piece of sheet music, a score.

In the beginning, they can perform the song, but only if they have the written music in front of them.

They must look at the musical notations on the page and translate them into what they're vocalizing or playing on their instrument.

The music is "with" them, there on the paper, but after they've played it many, many times, over and over, they no longer need the written music; they have it memorized. They have "*learned it by heart.*"

The song isn't something external to them, but it lives in them. It has entered into their mind and their heart. It has become a part of them.

So now, when they sing or play, they're expressing what's in them. In a real sense, they're not just performing; they're sharing a part of themselves.

That's similar to the difference between the Holy Spirit being "*with*" God's people, in the Old Testament, and being "*in*" God's people, now, in this present age. Lastly, He's a part of us.

When we act in obedience to God, when we follow Christ as God has called us to do, we aren't just performing, or following instructions, as they did when keeping the Old Testament Law, we're expressing what's in us. We're expressing "*Who*" is in us.

The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is a necessary gift. We need Him. It's only possible to grasp and absorb the truth about Christ because the Spirit is living in us. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, we simply couldn't understand spiritual truth.

1 Corinthians 2:14, "*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.*"

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For an unbeliever, the obstacle to understanding the truth about God is not intellectual, but spiritual. They're unable to accept it, and that inability to accept it makes them unable to fully understand it.

Here's an example. Have you ever tried to persuade someone of something that you knew to be true, one hundred percent, but the other person was simply unwilling to accept? For whatever reason.

Maybe it conflicted with the way they were raised; or because it was contrary to some deeply held view or some preconceived notion of theirs?

Perhaps because understanding it would require them to change in some way. Today's political beliefs fall into this category.

No matter how clearly the facts are stated, or how logically you presented your arguments, they simply refuse to believe.

They refuse to change their mind, even when presented with overwhelming evidence.

Now, were they truly unable to understand what you were trying to tell them? In a sense, yes, but their inability to understand was caused by their unwillingness to accept it.

In other words, their lack of comprehension wasn't a head issue, it was an issue of the heart and will. Now, they may have thought that you were obstinate or hardheaded, but even so, the point is the same.

An unwillingness to believe is an inability to understand. Since the truth of the Bible conflicts with what people in their natural state desire to do, which is to ignore God and just continue living their lives however they want, they're unwilling to believe.

Therefore, they're unable to understand. It seems like foolishness to them. Fairy tales. Wishful thinking. Non-sense. It literally makes no sense to them, no matter how clear and obvious it seems to you.

They're unwilling to see, and therefore they're unable to see. In a very real sense, they're blind to the truth.

Before we look down on them, remember that the only reason we can see what they can't is that we have the Holy Spirit.

It's not because we're smarter, more spiritually sensitive, more moral or because of any other reason, but only because God has revealed the truth to us through His Spirit.

Does that mean we give up hope of ever persuading anyone of the truth of the Gospel? Do we abandon logic and evidence in seeking to lead people to Christ, and just appeal to their emotions? No.

What it means is that our efforts to persuade others, using facts and logic, will only be successful if the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to the truth.

Conversion is a work of the Spirit, we can't argue someone into the kingdom. The Holy Spirit must be there with us, opening their hearts to the message. We need to ask Him to do that.

Now, while conversion involves the initial understanding of the Gospel that we have when we come to faith, that isn't the end of the Spirit's help.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand deeper truths about God throughout our Christian life.

1 Corinthians 2:9-12, *“However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”*

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The Spirit knows the mind of God. He knows what God has done for us. He knows what God can do for us. He knows what God will do for us in the future.

Here in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 12, it tells us that God gave us His Spirit, *“so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”* So that we can know what He knows.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to fully grasp what it means to be a child of God. That includes *“the things God has prepared for those who love him.”*

It includes the hope of eternal life. It includes joy, love and blessings in this world and in the world to come.

That hope is a great source of comfort as we go through various trials, and it will be an even greater source of comfort and strength when we come to the end of our lives.

The hope which the Spirit gives us concerning eternal life is what enables us to face death with peace and confidence.

Let me ask, Those of you who are parents or grandparents, do you love your children and grandchildren? Of course you do, and because you love them, you work to provide them with good things.

You labor and strive to make sure they have everything they need, and even more. You want them to have, not just the bare essentials, but good things, things that will cause them to be glad and to rejoice.

Things that perhaps they didn't even know they wanted or needed, until they received them.

You want to see that reaction of surprise, delight and amazement as they come to realize what you've given them.

Think of Christmas morning, or when they open a birthday present, or a graduation present, or a wedding gift, and what they receive is more than they were expecting, more than they even imagined. Have you ever had that experience?

God is the same way. We are His beloved children. He has prepared for us wonderful gifts, for this life and the next. Gifts of joy, peace, love, hope and comfort.

Gifts of freedom. Gifts of strength. Gifts of change and transformation. Gifts of renewal and healing. Gifts of provision. Gifts of friendship. Gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation, and many more.

Paul tells us in verse 9 that they're so wonderful and so abundant that we can't even imagine them. God fervently desires us to know and to receive those gifts. But how are we able to do that?

By the power of His Spirit, Who dwells in us. He's the one who opens our minds and hearts to understand and receive all of God's gifts. As verse 10 says, "*these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.*"

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Paul tells us that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can understand God's love for us. We can not only grasp it intellectually or theoretically, but we can experience it.

Ephesians 3:16-19, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

What is this passage trying to tell us? What does it mean? So, before we learn what it means, let's learn what it doesn't mean.

Understanding "*what God has freely given us,*" grasping the full extent of Christ's love for us, isn't just a matter of logically understanding what Scripture says.

Verse 19 tells us that Scripture "*surpasses knowledge.*" The understanding that the Spirit gives us isn't just the ability to interpret Scripture, it's the ability to interpret our lives in light of Scripture.

It isn't just the ability to grasp Biblical or theological truth. It's the ability to see how that truth applies to our lives.

In other words, the supernatural ability and power which the Holy Spirit gives us is the ability to combine knowledge with faith. That's what those without the Spirit can't do.

They can't combine knowledge with faith. They can study the Bible, but they can't grasp the true meaning of what they read, because they can't accept or understand what it means for them.

Now, they can acquire a type of knowledge by attending one of our many universities and earning a Ph.D. in Biblical literature, or a degree in New Testament or Old Testament studies.

They can study for years and become an expert in Hebrew and Greek, or Ancient Near Eastern history or Roman culture. They can study the writings of intellectual German theologians like Barth or Bultmann.

They can study the books of the Bible, but if they don't know the God of the Bible, then they can't truly understand what it means. Why?

Because their knowledge is not combined with faith. The Bible is just a dead letter to them. The "knowledge" that Paul's talking about goes beyond the intellect.

To "*know this love that surpasses knowledge,*" to "*grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*" to "*be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*" — describes a kind of knowing and understanding that can only be gained by experiencing Christ through faith.

That's a kind of knowledge and understanding that even years of academic study can't provide. It can only be understood by experience, by faith.

It's the Holy Spirit who grants us faith and enables us to have that experience of Christ's love. Well, if that's true, you might ask, then what kind of experience do I need to have?

Should I seek some kind of ecstatic religious experience, like speaking in tongues, as our charismatic or Pentecostal brethren practice? Do I need to see a vision, or hear God's voice? No.

You don't need any special kind of religious experience. What you need is to gain God's perspective on your life experience.

You need the Holy Spirit to enable you to interpret your life experiences with the eyes of faith, guided by the truth of the Word.

That's how we come to know God; that's how we come to experience the love of Christ.

By believing and trusting that what we have gone through in our lives, what we're going through right now, and what we'll experience in the future, is all an expression of God's love toward us in Christ.

The Holy Spirit can give us that perspective. Otherwise, we won't realize that God's hand has been at work in our lives, every day of our lives, and that God's hand is at work in our lives even now, today and every day.

The writer Frank O'Malley once described history as *"just one [darn] thing after another."*

Without the Holy Spirit giving us faith and insight, that's what our lives would seem like to us. Just a succession of events, with no overarching meaning or purpose.

But believers, those with the Spirit, can know that in all the events and experiences of our lives, God is at work, sovereignly drawing us to Himself, caring for us, and lovingly molding us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

That's the understanding that the Holy Spirit gives us. Not just understanding, intellectually, but trusting, in faith that God's hand is guiding everything we experience.

The highs and lows, the triumphs and the tragedies, the peak experiences and the mundane daily details of our lives. Trusting that all of that—literally, all of that—is an expression of God's love for us.

Now, a person without faith can look at the same experiences, the same life, and see nothing special in them. It's just stuff that happened.

To someone without faith, it's just random. Good things happen and bad things happen; that's life. Or worse, they see a cruel, uncaring universe playing nasty tricks on them.

But the understanding that the Holy Spirit gives us through God's Word tells a different story.

It says, "I may not understand how all of this is working out for my good, and for the glory of God. But I know and trust that it is."

That's truth. The result of that knowledge and faith is joy, peace, and contentment.

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Another way in which the Holy Spirit empowers us to live lives that are honoring and pleasing to God is that He gives us wisdom.

Colossians 1:9, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives."

Wisdom and understanding are closely linked, but wisdom also includes insight into the meaning and significance of what we know.

So, how then is godly wisdom, the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us, different from the world's wisdom?

The difference is that the wisdom of the world only takes into account what we can comprehend with our senses; what we can see, hear, touch and measure.

It only includes things which can be explained as the result of physical processes. In so doing, it ignores at least half of reality, which is all the things we can't see, hear, touch or measure.

Worldly wisdom's fine, as long as it restricts itself to its proper domain, those things which can be perceived with our five senses.

The problem comes when the wisdom of this world attempts to understand spiritual realities. Then it goes completely off the rails. Spiritual things can only be understood by Holy Spirit-enabled wisdom.

When worldly wisdom attempts to explain anything that has a spiritual dimension to it—and people do have a spiritual dimension—it just falls flat on its face.

Which is how we get some of the craziness we're seeing in the world today. That's why our culture has been decaying for many years.

People have rejected what the Bible tells us about human beings. They've substituted worldly wisdom for God's wisdom and God's revelation. That wisdom is failing them.

Human wisdom, in and of itself, unaided by the Holy Spirit, can't understand people, because people aren't only physical creatures; they're spiritual beings.

People love, hate, desire and hope. They rejoice and mourn. They seek meaning. They have a need to know the God who made them.

Worldly wisdom tries to explain all that as merely the result of physical processes, just chemicals sloshing around inside our brains, but it's more than that. Those things are all expressions of the spiritual aspect of our humanity.

When the world's wisdom attempts to understand spiritual things, and that includes who we are as human beings made in God's image, it fails completely, but those are the things that matter the most.

Let's pray that our nation turns back to God. Let's pray that God pours out His Spirit on our land. Why? Because without His Spirit, it's impossible to understand who we are and for what we were made.

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Conclusion

The Christian life isn't just work, work, work until we get to heaven. There's a payoff, here and now, and that payoff is hope, joy and peace.

Romans 15:13, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

The kind of hope, joy, and peace that Paul writes about is far superior to anything the world can give us. It's worth every ounce of labor or self-denial that it may cost.

The world offers only temporary, and superficial versions of peace and joy, but what we have is lasting and deep.

For the world, hope is nothing more than a wish, a desire. *"I hope things will work out the way that I want."*

But for a Christian, hope is sure and certain because it relies on the promises of God, and those promises never fail.

Our joy isn't dependent on circumstances. It's based on who we are in Christ, what Christ has done for us, and what He will do for us.

Because of that, we can have joy regardless of what we may be going through.

The world's peace requires a calm and peaceful life, but our peace comes from knowing and trusting in God. We can have peace even in the storms of life, because we know He'll bring us safely to the shore.

I don't know about you, but for me, it's well worth it. Knowing that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who lives in me, I don't have to be worried, anxious or fearful about anything.

Knowing that my hope in God's promises will be rewarded. Knowing that I can have joy in walking with Christ, no matter what my circumstances.

We're different than those without Christ, because we have power, the power of the Holy Spirit, and His power enables us to understand and experience all that God has for us.

Let's make sure that we're seeking to experience His power every day.