

Holy Spirit & Holy Scriptures

by John Stott

This sermon delves into the profound relationship between the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture, emphasizing the Spirit's role in searching the depths of God, revealing divine truths to the apostles, inspiring the words of Scripture, and enlightening believers to understand God's message. It highlights the importance of submitting to the supreme authority of Scripture, interpreting the Bible with sound principles, studying it in community, and approaching it with humility and openness for the Holy Spirit to illuminate our understanding.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 2:12, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 2:15, Ephesians 3:18, Psalm 119:105, John 16:13, Proverbs 3:5, James 1:5

Topics: "Role of the Holy Spirit", "Authority of Scripture"

Description

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Transcript

Well, good morning to everybody. Good morning. Our third Corinthian study is entitled Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture.

The outline you will find on page 32 of your convention program. And our text is 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 6 to 16. As it was read to us just now, I feel confident that you will have noticed that there is a heavy emphasis in this passage on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He is in fact mentioned by name, directly or indirectly, nine or ten times in these few verses. And in particular, the emphasis is on his teaching role as the Spirit of Truth. Indeed, it seems to me that this is one of the most important passages in the New Testament in regard to the relation between the Spirit and the Word, or between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scripture.

We all know that Holy Scripture and Holy Spirit are supposed to have something to do with one another, because the Holy Scripture is the creative product of the Holy Spirit. And all Christians know that. We say, if we recite the Nicene Creed, that he spoke through the prophets.

And we read in the second letter of Peter, chapter 1, verse 21, that holy men spoke from God as they were moved or carried along by the Holy Spirit. So it is the precise relationship between the Spirit and the Word that we're going to investigate in this passage this morning, and the part played by the Holy Spirit in the composition of Scripture. Because we evangelical people acknowledge as one of our main distinctives our submission to the supreme authority of Scripture, this is a very important topic for us today.

But before we come to the details, we need first to see the text in its context, a wise hermeneutical principle whenever we are studying Scripture. Everybody agrees that with chapter 2, verse 6, the Apostle Paul's argument changes course. Up to this point, he has been emphasizing the foolishness of the Gospel.

But now we come to verse 6, where he says, we do, however, speak a message of wisdom among those who are mature. Now, Paul is not contradicting himself, but I may quote from Professor F.F. Bruce. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, he writes, the wisdom Paul now says he proclaims is not something additional to the saving message of Christ crucified, it is in Christ crucified that the wisdom of God is embodied.

It consists rather in the more detailed unfolding of the divine purpose summed up in Christ crucified. But although he says we do speak wisdom, he immediately adds three qualifications or three correctives to be sure that he's not misunderstood. A, this wisdom is wisdom for the mature, the teleoi is the Greek word.

It's not for the unregenerate, it's not even for babies in Christ that we'll be thinking about tomorrow morning, since it is solid food and not milk. It's solid food that cannot easily be digested. But instead of being for the regenerate or for babes in Christ, it is for mature Christians who are anxious to penetrate into the fullness of the saving purpose of God.

So that's A, it's wisdom for the mature. B, it's wisdom from God. It's not the wisdom of this age, it's not human philosophy, it's not the wisdom of the rulers of this age, it's not the wisdom of the world.

Beginning of verse 7, it's wisdom from God, wisdom from God for the mature. And C, it is wisdom designed for our glory. Doxa is the word.

Now doxa is an essentially an eschatological word, it refers to our glorification at the end of time and in eternity when Christ comes in sheer and utter magnificence and we share in his glory and even our bodies are glorified. So the wisdom of God for the mature is not just good news of our justification, it's good news of our glorification. It alludes to our final perfection as we share in the glory of God.

Now all this seems to mean that there is a legitimate difference between our evangelistic message on the one hand and Christian nurture on the other. In evangelism we proclaim the folly of the cross, which is the wisdom and the power of God. We resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And through this folly of the preached message, the kirugma or the gospel, God saved those who believed. That's evangelism and Christ crucified is at the very forefront of our evangelistic message. In Christian nurture, however, building people up into maturity, we want them to understand God's total purpose and especially our forthcoming glorification.

This, verse 7, is God's secret wisdom and it can be known only by revelation. And Paul insists on this in verse 9, that all of us know I'm sure very well. It's a rather loose quotation from Isaiah 64, verse 4. God's wisdom is something which no human eye has seen, it's invisible.

No human ear has heard, it's inaudible. And no human mind has ever imagined, it's inconceivable. It's altogether beyond the reach of our eyes, our ears, and our minds.

It cannot be grasped either by scientific investigation or by poetic imagination. It's absolutely unattainable by our little, finite, fallen, and fallible minds. And therefore, if it is ever to be known, only God can reveal it.

It will never be known unless it is made known by God himself, which is exactly what he has done, verse 10. Many people stop verse 9, but you must always go on to the beginning of verse 10, that these things that cannot be known by the ear, the eye, or the mind, God has revealed by his Spirit. So let's think for a moment about the necessity of revelation.

When the apostle says that not even human minds have understood it, he's not denigrating the human mind. He is simply saying that the human mind, capable as it is of remarkable achievements in the realm of the empirical sciences, when it is seeking God, it flounders helplessly out of its depth. And the Old Testament equivalent of verses 9 and 10 is surely Isaiah 55, verses 8 and 9. Here it goes.

God says, my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, says the Lord. That is to say, the mind, or let me go on a moment, neither your ways are not my ways, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. And heaven is higher than the earth.

What does that mean? It means infinity. And there is no way by which we can climb up into the infinite mind of God. There is no ladder by which we can climb up.

This little mind cannot fathom the infinite mind of God. So how can we know his mind? Answer, we cannot, if he remains silent. We could never even begin to know the thoughts of God in the mind of God unless he had spoken.

Why, we cannot even read each other's minds. I don't know what you're thinking at the moment. And if I were to remain silent on the platform now, you wouldn't have the foggiest idea what I was thinking about.

Try. Any idea what I was thinking about? Well, you should guess I was watching birds. And I was actually watching the Japanese crane in the fullness of its beauty.

But you didn't know that. You hadn't the remotest idea. Now if we cannot read each other's minds, if we're silent, how much less can we read the mind of God? But God has spoken.

You know what is going on in my mind at this moment because I'm speaking to you. And I'm communicating the thoughts of my mind by the words of my mouth. That is exactly what God has done, communicated the secret thoughts in his mind by the words of his mouth.

He has spoken. And that's how we know what he's thinking. So God has revealed it to us by his spirit.

Us is emphatic in the Greek sentence. And it must surely refer not to all of us. We're not all direct recipients of a revelation of God.

It must refer to the apostles who were the recipients of divine revelation. Not only Paul himself, but by extension his fellow apostles as well. I'm reminded of Ephesians 3 verse 5 where we read that the mystery of Christ, the truth about Christ into which Jews and Gentiles can enter on the same terms, that mystery has now been revealed by the spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets who are the foundation on which

the church has been built.

That's Ephesians 3 verse 5 and Ephesians 2 verse 20. So this is the context. We had to introduce the theme today by looking at those things.

In what follows, Paul gives a comprehensive statement of the Holy Spirit's work as the agent of divine revelation. He is presented to us in four stages, as you'll see in your outline. First as the searching spirit, second as the revealing spirit, third as the inspiring spirit, and fourth as the enlightening spirit.

Firstly, he is the searching spirit, verses 10 and 11. Notice in passing that this verb, the Holy Spirit is searching the deep things of God, shows quite clearly that the Holy Spirit is personal. You can't go in for search and research unless you've got a mind.

And if you've got a mind, you must be a person able to search and research. Every research worker knows that. It's part of their personality that they are searching the truth.

So it's true, of course, that computers analyze the data that are fed into them, but true research work requires original investigation and reflection. So because the Holy Spirit is a person searching the deep things of God, we must never refer to him as it. I hope we've grown out of that.

He is a he, as Jesus made clear in his own teaching. Now this Holy Spirit, because he's a person, has a mind of his own with which he is able to think. And now Paul develops two fascinating pictures to indicate the Holy Spirit's unique qualifications in the work of divine revelation.

A, he searches the depths of God, and B, he knows the thoughts of God. A, he searches all things, even the depths of God, verse 10. Now the verb used there, which means to investigate, is the very same word that Jesus has used or the Greek translation of Jesus' Aramaic may be when he applied it to the Jews who searched the Scriptures.

It's the same Greek word, and it refers to diligent study and investigation. And Moulton and Milligan, in their famous lexicon, the vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, quote, a third century A.D. papyrus in which the searchers, using this same word, are customs officials who rummage about in our baggage, whether we want them to or not. Further, the deep things, the Greek word there, became in the second century A.D. a favorite term used by the Gnostic heretics, who claim to have been initiated into the deep things of God.

It may be an anachronism to suggest this, but it's just possible that in the middle of the first century, Paul deliberately borrowed from the Gnostic vocabulary, and that Paul is insisting here that the deep things of God were known and investigated not by the Gnostics who claim to have been initiated into the deep things of God, but by the Holy Spirit alone. Only the Holy Spirit can investigate the deep things of God. So the Holy Spirit is depicted as a restlessly inquisitive research worker, even a deep-sea diver who is seeking to fathom the deepest depths of the infinite being of Almighty God.

The Holy Spirit is God exploring the infinity of God. And then the second might be that the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. Verse 11, Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way, nobody knows the thoughts of God except the spirit of God himself.

Now the thoughts there are literally the things of a man or the things of God. Maybe the things of a man mean what we would call humanness, what it means to be a human being. So nobody understands what

humanness means except human beings.

An ant cannot possibly understand what it means to be a human being. Nor can a rabbit, nor can a frog, nor even can a chimpanzee for all the richness of the DNA that apparently it possesses. Nor even can one human being fully understand another human being.

How often, especially in adolescence, we have complained, nobody understands me. It's true, nobody does in fullness. We don't even fully understand ourselves.

Yet to some degree we human beings are self-conscious and self-aware and have some understanding of what humanness means. Now this is the concept of human self-awareness and self-consciousness that Paul applies to the Holy Spirit. Second part of verse 11.

In the same way, nobody knows the things of God except the spirit of God. So the Holy Spirit seems to be likened to the divine self-consciousness or the divine self-understanding. Just as nobody can understand a human being except that human being himself, so nobody can understand God except God himself.

Only God knows God. It's reasonable, isn't it, because of his infinity. So to sum up this first truth about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit searches the depths of God and the Holy Spirit knows the things of God.

And both statements indicate that the Holy Spirit has a unique understanding of God because he is himself God. The question then is what has the Holy Spirit done with what he has searched out and come to know. Answer, he's done what only he is competent to do.

He has revealed it. Only he knows God, so only he can make him known. It's again logical.

The searching spirit became, secondly, the revealing spirit. What the Holy Spirit has searched out and come to know, he went on to make known. This has already been stated in verse 10.

God has revealed it to us, the apostles, by his Spirit. And now the apostle Paul enlarges on this, elaborates it in verse 12. Let's look carefully at verse 12.

We, the same emphatic apostolic plural, the plural of apostolic authority, we, apostles, have not received the Spirit of the world. We have received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit from God, the searching spirit, the knowing spirit, and we have received the Holy Spirit in order that we may understand what God has freely given to us. So that indicates clearly that God had given the apostles two gifts, not one, but two separate but related gifts.

First, they had received God's salvation, what God has freely given to us. What has he freely given to us? Eternal life, salvation he's given us. And secondly, he's given us God's Spirit to enable the apostles to understand the salvation that God had given to them.

So the apostle Paul himself is the best example of having received this double gift of God. First, the gift of salvation, and then the gift of the Spirit to understand the gift of salvation. Paul's letters give us a superb exposition of the gospel of grace.

How God set his love upon the very people who didn't deserve it. How he sent his son to die for sinners like us who didn't deserve it. How God raised him from the dead to demonstrate that he had not died in vain, and how we, by faith inwardly, by baptism outwardly, may become united to Christ in his death and resurrection.

It's a moving exposition which stretches the mind and sets the heart on fire. We ask ourselves, where on earth did the apostle Paul get all this wonderful doctrine from? How did he understand all this? How could he make such a comprehensive statement of salvation? Answer, first because he had himself received this salvation, and secondly because he'd received the Holy Spirit to interpret his experience to him. Thus, the searching spirit became the revealing spirit, making God known to the biblical authors.

Now we're ready for stage three, are we? Hope so. Stage three is that the revealing spirit became the inspiring spirit. Verse 13 at the beginning.

NIV, this is what we speak, or Revised Standard Version, we impart this, this understanding of salvation which the Holy Spirit had given to the apostles. Now having received it, we impart it. Notice at once then that verse 12 refers to what the apostles had received, verse 13 refers to what they went on to impart.

Having received it, they pass it on to others. The apostles imparted to other people the understanding that they themselves had received. The searching spirit, who had revealed God's plan of salvation to the apostles, went on to communicate through the apostles what he had received, what they had received.

Just as the spirit did not keep his researches to himself, but revealed them to the apostles, so the apostles in their turn did not keep his revelation to themselves. They imparted or communicated it to others in the New Testament. They knew that they were trustees or stewards of the revelation of God.

They couldn't claim a monopoly of this divine revelation. They couldn't keep it to themselves. Truth is for sharing.

So they delivered to others what they had themselves received. Next question, how did they do so? How did they impart the truth that had been revealed to them? Answer, verse 13, not in words taught by human wisdom, not in their own words, in other words, but in words taught by the Holy Spirit. Notice this further reference of the Holy Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit who searched the depths of God and who revealed God's secrets to the apostles now gave the apostles the words with which to communicate them to others. Verse 13 is an unambiguous claim on the part of the apostle Paul to what we call verbal inspiration, that the inspiration of God extended to the very words which the apostles used in their communication, that those words had been given to them by the Holy Spirit. Now verbal inspiration is a very unpopular doctrine in the church today and when we begin to talk about it many people get fidgety and are tempted even to leave the tent if it wasn't so conspicuous to do so.

And I strongly suspect that the reason why verbal inspiration is unpopular is that it's misunderstood and that what people reject is not the true meaning of verbal inspiration but something of their own creation. So because this is so important I take the liberty of allowing myself a little digression in order to try to explain what verbal inspiration means. You'll see it again on your outline.

I want to use three negatives, what it does not mean, followed by one positive as what it does mean. A. Verbal inspiration does not mean that every word of the Bible is literally, I emphasize that adverb, true. That's a dictionary definition of fundamentalism, if you like, or a verbal inspiration.

I want to say that true understanding of verbal inspiration does not mean that. No, the biblical authors use a number of different types of literature. They use a number of different literary genres, as we call them.

That is, some is history, some is poetry, some are proverbs, some are letters, one is an apocalypse and so on. There are about 20 different kinds of literature and not all of them are to be interpreted literally. Each is to be interpreted according to its own literary style.

We interpret history as history, we interpret prophecy as prophecy, we interpret poetry as poetry, and so on. So what is inspired is the natural sense of the words according to the intention of each biblical author, whether this is literal or figurative. And some of the Bible is deliberately figurative.

Take Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament shows his handiwork, and in them, in the heavens, God has set a tabernacle, a tent, for the sun to live in. And it emerges like a bridegroom out of his chamber and runs like an athlete across the track of the heavens.

Within three verses, the sun is likened to a tent dweller, to an athlete, and to a bridegroom. You're not going to interpret this literally, are you? Beware of biblical literalism when the biblical authors themselves are not intending you to interpret it literally. That's the first thing.

Remember, Jesus himself was an opponent of biblical literalism when he was speaking symbolically. He said to Nicodemus, you've got to be born again. What, said Nicodemus? Re-enter my mother's womb and be born.

Don't be such a biblical literalist, Jesus said, allowing myself a little freedom. He said, I'm not talking about a second physical birth. And then the woman of Samaria, he said, if you'd known who it is who's speaking to you, you would have asked of him and he would have given you living water.

But you haven't got a bucket, she said. And he said, don't be a biblical literalist. I'm speaking of eternal life, symbolically, figuratively.

So we need to understand what type of literature it is. Verbal inspiration does not mean that every word is literally true. Verbal inspiration does not mean verbal dictation.

The Christian understanding of the Bible is very different from the Muslims' understanding of the Koran. Muslims believe that Allah, through the angel Gabriel, dictated the Koran to Muhammad in Arabic, and that Muhammad had nothing to do but take down the dictation. Christians do not believe that about the biblical authors.

On the contrary, we believe that the biblical authors were persons in full possession of their human faculties. They were not dictating machines. They were in possession of their faculties even during the process of inspiration.

So they were not simply taking down divine dictation. Thus, every biblical author has his own literary style, his own theological emphasis, and these distinctives of each author are not ironed out or destroyed by the process of inspiration. Moreover, many biblical authors were historians.

Have you thought how much of the Bible is history? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, two books of Samuel, two books of Kings, two books of Chronicles. It's all history. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, history.

We don't imagine that that history was all supernaturally revealed. No, they went in for their own historical researches. Luke tells us so.

In Luke 1, verses 1 to 4, he says he had diligently investigated the things that had taken part from the beginning. So, divine inspiration and historical research were not incompatible with one another. It's important to remember that.

So verbal inspiration does not mean verbal dictation. See, verbal inspiration does not mean that every text of Scripture is true, even in isolation from its context. No, as the Lausanne Covenant said, the Bible is without error in all that it affirms.

But not everything included in Scripture is affirmed by Scripture. And the best example, I think, is Job's comforters. Those long and tedious speeches by the so-called comforters of Job.

They gave him precious little comfort, as you know. Now, the thing is this. You cannot take anything out of the speeches of Job's comforters and declare it to be the word of God.

Because what they were saying is that Job was being punished for his sins. But Job chapters 1 and 2 affirm that he wasn't a sinner. He was a righteous man.

He feared God and avoided evil. And when you come to the 42nd chapter, the last chapter, God says that Job's comforters have not said about me what is right. So God himself contradicts Job's comforters.

So some of what the comforters said are included, not in order to be endorsed, but in order to be repudiated. Now, don't misunderstand me. The book of Job is the word of God.

It is the infallible word of God, if you take it as a whole. If you allow it to interpret itself. But each text is not the word of God apart from its context.

I hope that again is clear. Where are we? The inspired word of God is what is affirmed by scripture as instruction or command or promise or whatever it may be. So there are three negatives.

Now, D positive. Verbal inspiration means that what the Holy Spirit spoke through the biblical authors understood according to its literary genre, understood according to the plain natural meaning of the words used, understood according to its particular context and the intention of its authors. That is true and without error.

There is no need to be embarrassed, no need to be ashamed or afraid of verbal inspiration if it is properly understood. It is eminently reasonable because words matter. Words are the building blocks of sentences.

And it's impossible to convey a precise message if you do not choose precise words. It may surprise you that I have prepared my lecture or Bible reading this morning and my preparation is extended to the very words I have done before me because I don't want to confuse you. I have a precise message to convey so I have chosen precise words in which to convey it.

Words matter. And if they matter to God, they matter to us and vice versa. Charles Kingsley in the 19th century wrote this, these glorious things, words, are man's right alone.

Without words we shouldn't know any more of each other's hearts and thoughts than the dog knows of its fellow dog. For if you will consider, we always think to ourselves in words though you do not actually speak them aloud. And without words all our thoughts would be mere blind longings, feelings which we could not understand ourselves.

So this is the apostolic claim that the same Holy Spirit who searches the depths of God and knows the things of God, who revealed his findings to the apostles, went on to communicate them to others through the apostles in words which the Holy Spirit gave them. Thank God for that. What a marvelous and beautiful truth that is.

So he spoke his words through their words in such a way that their words were simultaneously his words. This is the double authorship of scripture. It is that God spoke, he's the author, through human authors, his words were their words at the same time.

This is the meaning of inspiration. The searching spirit, the revealing spirit, the inspiring spirit, and fourthly, the enlightening spirit. Verses 13 to 16.

How are we now to think of those who received this and other letters from the apostle Paul and read them? Were they left to their own devices to understand by themselves what had been written? No, indeed not. The same Holy Spirit who was active in the apostles, who wrote the letters, is active in those who receive and read them. The Holy Spirit was working at both ends of the communicating process inspiring the apostles and not inspiring us.

We are not inspired when we preach and teach but illuminating our minds to understand the inspired word of God. So this is already implied at the end of verse 13 which the New International Version translates expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. It's a complicated and rather enigmatic phrase and different English versions explain it in different ways but I'm assuming that the verb synchrono which can mean to combine means as it usually does in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, it means to interpret or to explain.

So I think the Revised Standard Version is right to translate it interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual people or those who possess the Spirit. In other words, the possession of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the biblical authors. He is shared by the Bible readers.

Certainly, I say again, the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration was unique to the prophets and apostles who were the biblical authors but and we preachers must not claim to be inspired as they were inspired but to this inspiration of the biblical authors the Holy Spirit added his work of illumination or interpretation. So let's distinguish between these words. Revelation and inspiration are objective.

They describe an objective process by which the Holy Spirit drew aside the veil to reveal Christ and the biblical witness to Christ. Illumination is a subjective process by which the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to understand the revelation that he's given us in Christ and in Scripture. Maybe I could illustrate it like this.

Supposing we come this morning to the Keswick Tent not for a convention meeting or Bible reading but supposing we come to an unveiling ceremony. Supposing, let me take Canon Horton. I had a great reverence for Canon Horton.

I used to call him Uncle Timothy and he was the chairman, you know, of the Keswick Council for many years. Now supposing the council had decided that as one of the great chairmen of the council we want a portrait of Canon Horton unveiled and there somewhere is the portrait. Now supposing you brought to the unveiling ceremony a friend of yours who was blindfolded.

A veiled picture and blindfolded eyes. Two processes are necessary before we can read what is written on the inscription under the portrait. First the portrait has to be unveiled.

My friend still can't read it because of the blindfold over his eyes. So the second process is to remove the blindfold then he can read because there's been an unveiling which is revelation and inspiration and an enlightenment which is the work of the Holy Spirit today. But what difference does it make? Verses 14 and 15 elaborate this truth and are in stark contrast to one another.

Verse 14 begins with a reference to the psychikos, the person without the Holy Spirit, the unregenerate, the natural, the authorized version puts it man. Verse 14 is about the psychikos. Verse 15 is about the pneumatikos.

Verse 14 is about the person without the Spirit. Verse 15 about the Christian with the Spirit, born again believer. And this person with the Spirit discerns or evaluates all things.

Not of course that he's become omniscient or infallible but the things to which he was before spiritually blind now at least begin to make sense to him. He understands what he'd not understood before even though he himself is not understood and is discerned by nobody. We haven't time to go into all these details.

I'm afraid they are a little bit difficult. Now we understand this. The Christian person remains something of an enigma to other people because of this inner secret of his spiritual life which they have not experienced or understood.

And this is surprising because, verse 16, nobody knows the mind of the Lord except... I'm sorry, I've lost my place. I wonder if you were attending and noticed that I'd skipped a page. So no wonder it was all a bit confusing even to me.

I want to ask again, we've got these two people, the Psychikos who doesn't have the Spirit and the Pneumatikos who does have the Holy Spirit. The born again and the unregenerate. Now what difference does it make as to which you are? And answer is it makes all the difference in the world because it is the indwelling of the Spirit who enlightens our minds to grow in our understanding of the Word of God.

And this illumination of our minds by the Spirit is a common Christian experience. I can bear witness to it. I used to read the Bible as a teenager because my mother had taught my sisters and me to do so.

And I continue to do so out of respect to her but it was all double-ditched to me. I had no idea what it meant. When I came to Christ and was born again by the sheer grace and mercy of God, I'm not saying of course that everything was clear.

It isn't today. But immediately it began to make sense in a way that it had never done before. William Grimshaw, the 19th century evangelical leader, the 18th century evangelical leader, spoke after his conversion like this.

If God had drawn up his Bible to heaven and sent me down another one, it could not have been newer to me than it was. The Bible became a new book, a light unto our path. Now I'm going to allow myself another little digression because I've still got five or ten minutes before my time is up.

Because I think there will be in your minds this question, if the Holy Spirit is the enlightening Spirit, if he is the illumining Spirit, why don't we agree with one another more than we do? Why do we still disagree if he enlightens you and he enlightens me? Why don't we agree more than we do? Well my general answer actually is this. We do agree with one another a great deal more than we disagree. Otherwise we wouldn't

be at Keswick.

We are all one in Christ Jesus and I would suspect if we sat down alongside one another and compared notes, we would agree probably 90 to 95% in what we believe. I think so. Anyway, I want to say that we would agree even more with one another if we fulfilled the following conditions.

One, we must accept the supreme authority of Scripture because the big and painful divisions in the church are between the reformed and the unreformed churches, between those determined to submit to Scripture and those who are unwilling to do so. But among churches that do submit to the supreme authority of Scripture, I say again we're probably 90 to 95% agreed. Secondly, we must remember that the chief purpose of Scripture is to bear witness to Christ as Saviour.

So in the central truths of the Bible about Christ and salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone and so on. Scripture is perspicuous, it's plain, it's transparent. You can see through it.

The essential message of Scripture is plain. It's the indifferent matters indifferent, the secondary matters in which we allow ourselves some liberty of interpretation. Three, we must develop sound principles of interpretation.

It's often said that you can make Scripture teach anything you like. When somebody comes up to me today and says that, oh, you can make Scripture teach anything you like, you may be surprised, I begin by agreeing with them. I say I agree with you, you can.

You can make Scripture mean anything you like if you are unscrupulous enough. But if you are scrupulous in your use of proper principles of biblical interpretation, far from your manipulating Scripture, you'll find that Scripture controls you. So we have to use proper principles of biblical interpretation.

Four, we have to study Scripture together and not only by ourselves. The church is the hermeneutical community, the community within which God means his words to be interpreted. So we can help each other to interpret Scripture.

And it's very good not only to read Scripture on our own, but to read it in a Bible study group, in a fellowship group, so that we can help each other. And especially if our group is multicultural, if it includes people from many different cultures, we will begin to see through their eyes things to which we ourselves have been blind. And that's what Paul meant in Ephesians 3.18, that we might be able with all the saints, with all the people of God, not by ourselves in isolation, but with all the people of God, the full dimensions of his love.

We need each other. Fifthly, we must come to the biblical text with a humble, open, and receptive spirit, ready for God to break through our cultural defenses and to challenge and change us. You know, if we come to Scripture with our minds made up, with a closed mind, then we shall never hear the thunder clap of the word of God.

All we shall hear is the soothing echoes of our own cultural prejudice. We shall see what we want to see, unless we come, we cry to God to open our eyes, not just to behold wonderful things in his law. He says to us, what makes you think I have wonderful things to say to you? I actually today have some rather disturbing things.

Are you prepared to listen? Oh no, we said, I come to the Bible to be comforted. I don't come to the Bible to be disturbed. And so we go on in our prejudices because we're not willing to learn.

But if we come to Scripture with an open, unprejudiced, humble, receptive mind, there is no knowing what God may show us. Spiritual discernment. Now I conclude.

We've considered the teaching role of the Holy Spirit, searching, revealing, inspiring, enlightening. He searches the depths of God and he knows the things of God. He's uniquely qualified to reveal God.

He is the revealing spirit because he revealed his findings to the apostles and the other biblical authors, organs of unique revelation. And thirdly, he communicated these things through the apostles to others in order that they might understand in words chosen by the Holy Spirit. And fourthly, he enlightens the minds of the biblical readers to discern what he has revealed to and through the apostles.

He continues his work of illumination today. It's all very beautiful. I end with a little illustration from the great Charles Simeon of Cambridge.

For 54 years, the vicar of Holy Trinity in Cambridge at the beginning of the last century, great biblical expositor. And he used to use the old fashioned sundial as an illustration. He said, if you go out into the garden on a cloudy day when the sun is not shining, and you look at the sundial, all you see is figures but no message.

But if the sun breaks through the clouds and shines on the sundial, immediately the finger points. And he says, if I come to scripture on a cloudy day with sin between me and God, I will not receive any message from the word of God. It's just ink and paper and print and so on.

But if the sun breaks through, the sunlight of the Holy Spirit breaks through on the printed page, on my darkened mind, and God says, let there be light, then the finger points. And I receive a message that I would never have received otherwise. So the word and the spirit belong together.

No word without the spirit. And the spirit's sword is the word of God. Let's never separate what God has united in spirit and word.

Let's pray. We spend perhaps a moment or two in silence. I think it would be good to thank God for these two precious gifts, his spirit and his word.

We desire to unite, Heavenly Father, in thanksgiving that you have graciously been pleased to give us these two most precious gifts. We want to thank you for your written word, which is our rule and guide, our authority, to which we desire to submit, from which we desire to go on learning all our lives. And we thank you that you have given us your Holy Spirit to be our teacher, to illumine our minds.

And we want to pray that we may come to your word each day, expectantly looking to you in humility to open our blind eyes and illumine our path. Heavenly Father, hear our prayers as we come to you in the name and for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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