

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Q: THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TODAY, PEOPLE BELIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT COMMUNICATES WITH THEM THROUGH AN INNER VOICE, OR THROUGH FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS. WHY IS THIS BELIEF EXTREMELY DANGEROUS TO FAITH AND SALVATION?

In addition to God the Holy Spirit, there are also many demonic spirits near us at all times. Without God's Word as your guide, you have no way of knowing which communication is coming from the devil since he constantly disguises himself as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). On this matter God is very emphatic and clear: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1). "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Q: THIS ISSUE OF GOOD NEWS REPEATEDLY STATES THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL SPEAK TO YOU ONLY THROUGH THE WORD. WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

BECAUSE THE CERTAINTY OF YOUR SALVATION IS AT STAKE! If you base your faith on spiritual emotions or religious feelings, you will be always unsure of your total forgiveness, God's constant presence, and your eternal salvation. Basing your faith on your emotions will cause you to be up one day and down the next. God's Word never changes. "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow" (Jam. 1:17).

Do not allow yourself to be fooled by your dreams, feelings, and emotions, all of which the devil can twist and manipulate. Instead, insist on listening to God's voice ONLY in the Word. Then you will never need to wonder whether the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. God also warns that dreams and other experiences will NEVER speak more clearly than the Bible itself. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [that is, the written Word of God], neither will they be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Lk. 16:31).

Q: ARE YOU SAYING THAT GOD DOES NOT WORK IN OUR LIVES IN ANY WAY OTHER THAN THE SPECIFIC AND CLEAR REVELATION IN HIS WORD? DOESN'T THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE OUR DAILY LIVES IN ANY OTHER WAY?

Certainly God works in other ways! In the Old Testament, Abraham opened the door of opportunity to his nephew Lot, letting Lot choose which land he wanted for himself (Gen. 13:8-11). In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives opportunities to His Christians, opening such doors as a choice of employment, a chance to move to a new place, and so forth. In providing these opportunities, the Holy Spirit happily allows us to choose what we want, just as Lot chose the land he desired. The Spirit will not, however, speak to you directly and tell you which choice you should make.

The Holy Spirit also guides Christians in ways that are sometimes beyond their choosing. For example, God allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery (Gen. 37:28) and imprisoned in Egypt (Gen. 39:20), so that Joseph could save his family and people from a horrible drought.

Here is the point: God may permit, and even cause, certain events to occur in our lives in order to accomplish His loving and gracious will to draw us and keep us close to Himself. However, in His Word, God says He will never speak to you or any of His other children through dreams, visions, small voices, or any other direct way, because there is no way you could determine for sure that this communication is from Him, and not from the devil disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

Q: IN WHAT WAY DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT INFLUENCE OUR DECISION-MAKING WHEN THE BIBLE DOES NOT SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE ISSUE AT HAND?

When Christians must make decisions that are not directly addressed by the Word, they are free to make their best choice, guided by the Word. You need not seek a special message from the Holy Spirit because there is no right or wrong answer in many decisions!

Obviously, a Christian would never be troubled by the question of whether or not he should become a professional thief. God's Word is made clear by the Holy Spirit: "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15). But suppose the man's choice is less obvious. Suppose he must decide whether to stay at his current job or to move his family to a distant city in order to work at a better job. He does not need to decide which job God wants him to have because God has provided both opportunities to him (Jam. 1:17). Therefore, the man will simply pray, "If the Lord wills . . ." (Jam. 4:15) and make his best decision.

Finally, God Himself says His revealed and written Word is totally adequate for everything and every situation. Reliance on dreams, intuition, or special voices is not only unnecessary, it is an offense to God and a sin. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).✠

“We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine”

EPHESIANS 4:14

DENOMINATION	TEACHING	WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
<p>ANGLICAN/ EPISCOPAL</p>	<p>The Anglican Catechism says, “We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation” (<i>Book of Common Prayer</i>, p. 852). That is, you know the Spirit’s presence not by looking to God’s Word alone, but by looking to the harmony you might have with other people or within yourself.</p>	<p>Some people try to achieve man-made harmony by seeking common emotional feelings. True Christian harmony comes by being one united in God’s Word. “Conduct yourselves . . . with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:27). You have true harmony not merely when you are in emotional harmony; but rather when the Holy Spirit leads you “to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:13).</p>
<p>REFORMED (CALVINIST)</p>	<p>In his <i>Institutes on the Christian Religion</i>, John Calvin said, “Until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed . . .” (III, 1, 3). In other words, the Holy Spirit does not really teach you the things of Christ until your mind is focused on Him [the Spirit].</p>	<p>Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will “bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn. 14:26) and “He will testify about Me” (Jn. 15:26). The Holy Spirit is working not when your mind is intent on Him, but when it is intent on Jesus Christ and His forgiveness of sins.</p>
<p>BAPTISTS</p>	<p><i>The Baptist Faith and Message</i> (p. 41) says that when you surrender to the Holy Spirit, you “should get buoyancy and exhilaration” and “should have a permanent lift and glow.” This directs you to look to your feelings to make sure the Holy Spirit is working in you.</p>	<p>If you do not experience the buoyancy and exhilaration, the lift and glow, you could doubt that God loves you and saves you. But God says that no matter if you are up or down emotionally, nothing “will be able to separate [you] from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).</p>
<p>METHODISTS</p>	<p>The <i>Book of Discipline</i> says, “‘Life in the Spirit’ involves diligent use of the means of grace such as praying, fasting, attending upon the sacraments, and inward searching in solitude.” In other words, you can find the Holy Spirit working in you when you search your inner feelings and experiences.</p>	<p>Jesus warns against trusting what is in your heart, because “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries” (Matt. 15:19). Instead, God wants you to look to “the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).</p>
<p>PENTECOSTALS</p>	<p>R. A. Torrey, a leader of the Pentecostal movement, said, “The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and subsequent and additional to His regenerating work” (<i>What the Bible Teaches</i>, p. 271). In other words, Torrey says the Holy Spirit may make you a Christian, but you should look for an additional experience from Him apart from your water Baptism.</p>	<p>St. Paul said, “There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one Baptism” (Eph. 4:4–5), and Jesus said, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Your water Baptism is your “washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5).</p>
<p>CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN</p>	<p>In the <i>Smalcald Articles</i>, Lutherans boldly say, “It must be firmly maintained that God gives no one His Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before” (3, VIII, 3), and “We should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil” (3, VIII, 10).</p>	<p>God does not want you to rely on your inner experiences or feelings, which are constantly changing. Instead, He wants you to be confident that the Holy Spirit works only through the Word of Christ “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His Name” (Jn. 20:31).</p>