

Revealed by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:9-16

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church so that we would believe the gospel and live walk its power. The Spirit does the will of the Father and applies the work of Christ to the believer, revealing to us the deep things of God.

Summary of the Text

Paul came to Corinth not with persuasive speech, but with the power of the Spirit (2:1-5). He speaks wisdom, not of the so-called philosophers (“lovers of wisdom”), but of God who hid these things from the rulers of the age. Had they known this wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (vv. 6-8). In verse 9 he quotes Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” What the Lord would do for us through Jesus and in the power of the Spirit poured out on the church could not have been imagined. And yet God reveals them to us through His Spirit, including the deep things of God (v. 10). A man’s own spirit knows him best, and in this way we are like God (v. 11). But whereas we being finite cannot share our spirits, God freely gives us His Spirit so that we might know what He has given us (v. 12). We discover the goodness and holiness of our God through the personal agency of the Holy Spirit. This is not Paul being clever; only the Holy Spirit teaches these things (v. 13). The ideal, noble, brilliant, uncorrupted man (*psuchikos*) at his autonomous best does not receive the things of the Spirit, but regards them as foolishness. The spiritual man discerns these things, and no one without the Spirit can judge him (v. 15). No one can counsel, instruct, teach, or reveal things to God, but we have the mind of Christ (v. 16; Is. 40:13-14).

The Glorious Trinity

If someone could fully comprehend the nature of God, then they would be God. If you have to fully comprehend Him in order to worship Him, then you are committed to worshipping that which is not God, to idolatry. It’s helpful to remember at the outset that we are not God, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in His image, and need His revelation in order to know Him and understand ourselves. From this place of humble wisdom we can learn a lot. The Trinity is the three in one and one in three, three persons in one God, one God in three persons where both unity and plurality are equally ultimate. It’s not the case that He’s really one but we just talk about Him in three persons, which would be modalism (one God with three faces/modes). And it’s not the case that He is actually only three, but we just speak of Him in the singular, which would be polytheism. God is triune, and before He created anything the persons of the Trinity were not lonely or lacking anything, but existed in perfect joy from all eternity. The fact that we cannot fully understand Him does not mean that we can’t understand Him truly and accurately as far as we are able and He has revealed Himself to us. You can know something true about quantum mechanics without knowing all about it. God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Spirit, and He is the truth who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). Therefore we have true but limited knowledge, limited by our finitude. A.W. Tozer said, “All of God does all that God does.” When we consider the work of the Spirit, we don’t forget the ontological unity of the Trinity. But we speak the way Scripture does, in terms of the “economic” Trinity, of the roles the different persons play. God the Father sent the Son. The Son died on the cross, not the Father or the Spirit. The Spirit was poured out upon the church and into our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

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The Deep Things of God

When we learn about God and grow in His grace (love, knowledge, experience), we do so led by the person of the Holy Spirit: “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (v. 10). Why did God give us His Spirit? So that we would know the things God has freely given us (v. 12). Paul’s prayer for the churches often boils down to knowing who we are and what we have in Christ (Eph. 1:17-23). He erupts with infallible run-on sentences because it’s hard to stop describing what God has done for us. In the gospel, God has saved us from our sins, and He accomplished this by becoming one of us. Jesus took on flesh, resisted sin, died, rose, ascended into heaven, and then poured His Spirit on the Church in order to equip us to fulfill our mission, leading us into all truth (Matt. 28:18-20; Jn 16:13). The Old Testament Festival of Weeks (Lev. 23:16) was celebrated seven weeks and one day after Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread). It was a harvest festival of the firstfruits (Ex. 23:16; Num. 28:26). Israel celebrated the abundant provision and gracious gifts that they received from the Lord. This looked forward to the victory of Christ our Passover which was fulfilled on the cross and at the resurrection, and then 50 days later we see the power of the cross in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church (Acts 2). The Spirit came in a rushing wind, empowering the apostles to speak the languages of the people visiting for the festival from other nations (Acts 2:1-12). Peter preaches the gospel and says Jesus was “exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (v. 33). The Spirit moves us to confess Jesus as Christ (1 Jn. 4:1-4). God causes the Scriptures to be written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Spirit sends out the preached word and enables us to understand it (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16; 1 Thess. 1:5, 2:13). He is poured out into our hearts and given to us as a guarantee of our redemption to come (Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22). By the Spirit we are baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13, Tit. 3:5), and by Him we commune with God at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-26). We believe and enjoy all of these things because of the work of the Spirit.

Discerning the Work of the Spirit

The marks of the apostles in all signs, wonders, and mighty deeds were evident in their time (2 Cor. 12:12). We don’t see the same wonders and mighty deeds. The canon of Scripture has closed and we’ve not heard anyone miraculously speak in a foreign language (cf. Rev. 22:18-19). Does this mean the Spirit is not at work? How do we rightly discern Him? Many associate the work of the Spirit with emotionalistic events like the Toronto Blessing in 1994. But uncontrollable laughing, ecstatic utterance, and vague predictions are not marks of the Spirit. Scripture is complete and tongues will cease, but the work of the Spirit continues. His job is to glorify the Son, not draw attention to Himself (Jn. 16:12-15). If you honor the Son, that’s the work of the Spirit in your heart and life. If you are convicted to build others up and speak the truth in love, that is the work of Spirit whom you can grieve (Eph. 4:29-30). If you are moved to show the same kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness to your brother and sister that you have received from God in Christ, that’s the work of the Spirit. If you long for redemption of your body, for complete salvation, that’s the work of the Spirit in you (Rom. 8:26). If you are being sustained in trials, having perseverance which leads to character and that to hope which will not disappoint, that’s because God’s love was poured into you by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:3-5). Jesus is in heaven with the Father, but we are not orphans. We have the Spirit.