

Pentecost and the Coming of the Holy Spirit

Part 1—Old Testament Background and New Testament Expectation

[Brian Schwertley](#)

One of the most important events in the history of redemption is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was on the day of Pentecost that the resurrected, ascended, glorified King poured out His Spirit upon the church. This outpouring begins not only the formation of the Christian church with its spiritual gifts for edification and godly dominion but also the spread of the gospel from Judea, to Samaria and the Gentile world. The salvation of the elect and the re-creation of heaven and earth merited by the suffering Servant is to become a historical reality in time and on earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. To understand the significance of this pivotal event we will examine a number of areas related to Pentecost. (I) The Old Testament Background. Why did God choose Pentecost as the time to pour out the Holy Spirit? (II) New Testament Expectation. How do prophetic and preparatory statements regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit shed light on the meaning of the Pentecost event? (III) The events of Pentecost. What is the meaning of the sensible signs that occurred on that day and what is the inspired interpretation of the outpouring given in Peter's Pentecost sermon? (IV) Further New Testament theological reflection. How do the epistles interpret the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its continuing effects upon the church?

The Old Testament Background

A study of the Old Testament passages related to Pentecost or “the Feast of Weeks” indicates that God's choice of this particular feast to pour out the Holy Spirit was not an accident.

The Feast of Weeks is one of the three national feasts of Israel. The other national feasts are the Passover or The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 23:14 ff.; Lev. 23:4-8). That the Passover is intimately connected with the feast of unleavened bread is demonstrated by the fact that the Passover leads to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the gospel accounts [Mt. 24:17; Mk. 14:12] refer to the Passover as the first day of unleavened bread) and the Feast of Tabernacles. The three national feasts (often called the great festivals) required the attendance of all male Israelites at the national sanctuary. “Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God” (Ex. 23:17; Dt. 16:16).

That these feasts contain elements typical or symbolic of great redemptive truths cannot be denied. In the first feast, the Passover (which commemorated the covenant people's deliverance from Egypt), there is “the lamb slain.” The central truth of the Passover is redemption by the sacrificial death of Christ. His sinless blood is the covering that propitiates the wrath and judgment of God. This typical aspect of the Passover is explicitly recognized in the New Testament. “For indeed Christ our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). “Behold the Lamb of God!’ is still the cry that first reaches a sinner's ear and a sinner's heart. Here is the first feast for fallen man.”¹ “Christ and Him crucified is the one supreme object in God's plan of

¹Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966 [1846]), 398.

redemption.”² There also is the “unleavened bread.” The unleavened bread reminded the Israelites of their hasty flight from bondage in Egypt. The release from bondage is typical of Jesus’ release of His people from sin, Satan and the world to salvation rest. That the people are to flee with unleavened bread points to the necessity of repentance and sanctification for the new Christian life. A believer’s deliverance from corruption (leaven) begins at the time when that person forsakes his house of bondage. Paul writes: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

What tied the Passover to Pentecost was the presentation of a sheaf before the Lord on the first day after Passover. This sheaf was taken from the first harvest of spring which was the winter barley (Lev. 23:10 ff.). The Feast of Weeks is to occur seven weeks (counted from the day after the Sabbath, cf. Lev. 23:15-16) or fifty days after the Sabbath, hence the name “Pentecost” meaning fiftieth. Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks or ingathering, is organically connected to and brings to completion the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We must keep this in mind as we consider the typology and significance of the wave-sheaf and Pentecost.

The wave-sheaf pointed to a number of important truths. First, a sheaf is representative of the whole harvest to come. It was to be harvested and waved after entering the promised land. Obviously the sheaf pointed to the full harvest that would take place in seven weeks (the wheat harvest). Taking place first in the promised land it points to the blessing of salvation, victory and salvation rest. Second, the primary meaning of the sheaf is typological. The sheaf represents the resurrected Christ, the first fruits. Jesus “our Passover” was crucified on Friday, then on the day after the Sabbath He arose from the dead. He was “waved” or presented before the Father as the victor over sin, Satan and death. Jesus was the first fruits. Paul writes: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep....But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Hodge writes: “The apostle does not mean merely that the resurrection of Christ was to precede that of his people; but as the first sheaf of the harvest presented to God as a thank-offering, was the pledge and assurance of the ingathering of the whole harvest, so the resurrection is a pledge and proof of the resurrection of his people.”³ By virtue of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection we are raised spiritually and then at the end of the world we are raised physically. Andrew Bonar writes: “This first *sheaf* is the pledge of *our resurrection*, as well as acceptance; or rather, of our *declared acceptance by our resurrection*...It is a type and pledge of our harvest—this earth’s season of ripe increase—the day for which every providence, every event has been preparing—the day for which every breeze and every hour of sunshine has been ripening the wide fields—the people, cities, and hamlets of the whole world....The Lord himself will then rejoice with the joy of harvest.”⁴

Having noted the significance of the Passover and wave-sheaf (they typify the death and resurrection of Christ) we can now more fully understand the typical nature of Pentecost. Our Lord waited fifty days after His resurrection to pour out the Holy Spirit to fulfill the spiritual realities that the original Feast of Weeks pointed to. There are a number of points that need to be considered.

²W. G. Moorehead, *The Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957), 213.

³Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), 323.

⁴Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus*, 404.

First, what is the significance of the fifty days? Jesus walked the earth and instructed His disciples for forty days after His resurrection (Ac. 1:3). The number forty is often used in Scripture: The flood was “upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:17). Moses was with God on the mountain forty days and forty nights when he received the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28; cf. 24:18; Dt. 9:9-10). Israel wandered in the wilderness and ate manna for forty years before they entered the promised land (Ex. 16:36; Nu. 32:13; Dt. 2:7; 8:4). Jesus was tempted by the devil for forty days (Mt. 4:2; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:2). The number forty is associated with judgment that leads to a new beginning for planet earth (Gen. 7:17); a type of re-creation where the wicked are destroyed while the righteous are given dominion over the earth. During the forty years in the wilderness the unbelieving generation of Israel died off before their children took dominion over the land through conquest (Heb. 3:17-19). The number forty is associated with instruction and the giving of the covenant law (Ex. 34:28). While many modern professing Christians have a very negative view of the Mosaic law, in truth the law was a precious gift of God to His people. If obeyed, there would be justice in the land and Israel would be an example of covenant love and godly dominion to the surrounding heathen nations (Dt. 4:6 ff.). The number forty is associated with a time of testing before conquest and victory (Josh. 5:6; Lk. 4:2).

During His forty days Jesus carefully instructs the disciples and prepares them for the spiritual conquest of the whole earth. Note the post-resurrection words of the great commission. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Mt. 28:18-19). Note, also the last words of our Lord before He ascends to heaven: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Ac. 1:8).

Christ spent ten days in heaven before He poured out His Spirit during Pentecost. Why did He wait ten days before taking action? One reason was that the blood of our Lord had to be exhibited in heaven. It had to be fully poured out in the heavenly sanctuary. Another reason is found in biblical numerology. The number ten in the holy Scriptures signifies completeness and redemption that would never need to be repeated or added to. The outpouring at Pentecost is the new covenant beginning of the world-wide application of this perfect salvation. Further, the seven Sabbaths between the wave-sheaf (Christ’s resurrection) and Pentecost (the giving of the Holy Spirit) indicates a full and complete period. With Pentecost the old covenant order officially came to an end. The formation of the church on the seventh-first day indicates a new beginning and the completed or final administrative form of the covenant grace. Finally, the fifty day period (forty plus ten) had to occur to prophetically fulfill the typological meaning of the old covenant public festivals of unleavened bread and the feast of weeks.

Second, what is the meaning of the typology of the first fruits associated with the feast of weeks? Numbers refers to the Feast of Weeks as “the day of first fruits” (28:26). We have noted that the wave-sheaf represents the resurrected Christ, the first-fruits (1Cor. 15:20, 23), “the first born from the dead” (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). The feast of weeks was a completion of the harvest that began with the barley wave-sheaf seven weeks earlier. The wave-sheaf is the beginning of the harvest that occurs during the day of first fruits (Nu. 28:26) or “the Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16). The resurrection of Christ leads directly to the great harvest of souls on the day of Pentecost. Our Lord instructed the disciples on this subject when He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (Jn. 12:24). The great conversion of souls that occurred on Pentecost with

the formation of the New Testament church with men present from every nation under heaven (Ac. 2:5) is the first great harvest of the resurrected Messiah. What occurred at Pentecost proved that the buried grain had arisen from the dead. It proved that Jesus had ascended to the Father and was now harvesting His crop of people. James writes: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (Ja. 1:18). Just as Christ's resurrection guarantees the salvation and ultimate bodily resurrection of His people, the great expression of the Lord's power at Pentecost leading to the first great harvest proves that a full harvest will follow the first fruits; that eventually the whole body of elect souls will be redeemed.

This teaching is supported by the typology of the two wave-loaves that were central to the Feast of Weeks. "You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD" (Lev. 23:17). These loaves are made of fine wheat grain from the new crop and are even identified as the "first-fruits." What do these two wave-loaves symbolize? The fact that the loaves are made with leaven excludes both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, no commentators are of the opinion that these loaves represent Jesus. The answer to this question can be found in the Bible's frequent application of the term "first-fruits" to God's people. In Jeremiah we read: "Israel was holiness to the LORD, the firstfruits of His increase" (2:3). Paul applies the term to the patriarchs: "For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy" (Rom. 11:16). As we noted earlier James tells the believers of his day that they are a "kind of the first fruits of His creatures" (1:18). The term "first-fruits" in these passages is not directly related to the "wave-sheaf" of Passover which points to the risen Messiah but to the "wave-loaves" of Pentecost. Moorehead writes: "God's people are the fulfillment of the promise held forth by the wave-loaves of Pentecost. God's harvest-field is the world. Israel was the first-fruits, nationally, of a larger harvest to come. The church is the first-fruits of a still more bountiful harvest to be gathered. The one-hundred-twenty disciples of the memorable Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out with such marvelous results (Acts 2), became the earnest and pledge of the mighty ingathering which is to continue until the fulness of the Gentiles is come in (Rom. 11:25)."⁵

While the meaning of the wave-loaves is clear, there are still two questions related to the wave-loaves that need to be answered. (1) Why are there two loaves? (2) Why are the loaves leavened? Some commentators believe the two loaves represent the church in both her old and new covenant expression. In support of this interpretation is the application of the term first-fruits to both the old and new covenant people of God (Jer. 2:3; Rom. 11:16; Ja. 1:18). Further, does not Paul refer to the new covenant church as "one bread and one body" (1 Cor. 10:17)? How can two loaves represent *one* organic body—the communion of the saints? Another interpretation is that the two loaves refer to the two component parts of the Christian church, the Jews and the Gentiles that come together as one in Christ. In principle the old covenant church came to an end at the cross when Jesus died and the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51). Yet on the day of Pentecost when the new covenant church was founded the full acceptance of Gentiles in the body was not yet recognized. At that unique period in redemptive history the old and new covenant expression of the church existed side by side. The two loaves could emphasize the inclusion of the Gentiles in the formation of the church.

The two loaves were to be baked with leaven. The leaven indicates a number of things. These loaves typify the people of God on earth in which a measure of evil remains. Although all believers are regenerated and baptized with the Holy Spirit, sinless perfection cannot be achieved

⁵W. G. Moorehead, *The Tabernacle*, 220-221.

this side of heaven. The fact that the loaves are leavened also indicates that this is common household bread to be consumed. While the church is consecrated to God, it has a discipling mission to the nations. It is to minister the Word of God and the sacraments to all peoples.

New Testament Expectation

A study of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost would not be complete without an examination of the anticipation of this great event that is found in all the gospels. All of the gospels (almost from the beginning) emphasize that the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit. As we examine these passages we will note a connection between this outpouring and Jesus' role as the suffering servant who submits to the will of the Father in all things as well as Christ's post-resurrection dominion over all things in heaven and on earth.

(1) The first information about the outpouring comes from the lips of John the Baptist: "Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.' And with many other exhortations he preached to the people" (Lk. 3:15-18; cf. Mt. 3:11-12; Mk. 1:7-8). As the people were wondering whether John was the Christ, John (being a prophet) contrasts his own ministry with that of the coming Messiah. In order to stop the speculation and pave the way for the acceptance of Jesus, the baptizer sets forth a threefold superiority for our Lord. The coming one is described as "mightier" or "stronger" than John. Indeed, so mighty that John is not worthy to untie His sandal straps. This may refer to the Messiah's divinity or special anointing by the Holy Spirit or both. Also, while John baptizes with water, the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John (the last Old Testament prophet) baptized with water as a sign of cleansing associated with repentance. Jesus, however, does not merely administer a sign but pours out the Holy Spirit. He has power over salvation itself.

John's statement raises an important question. What is the baptism with fire? There are a number of different opinions as to what the fire refers. One interpretation is that fire refers to an aspect, consequence or blessing associated with Spirit baptism. The fire could point to the cloven tongues of fire observed on the heads of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Fire could be a reference to God's special presence in believers. Fire could also refer to the converting operation of the Holy Spirit where hearts are regenerated, purified and then further refined. A much more likely interpretation is that the fire points to judgment in history and the end of history. There are a number of reasons for regarding fire as a reference to judgment. a) The immediate context pictures the baptism with the Spirit and fire as involving the separation of the wheat from the chaff (v. 17). While the wheat is gathered in the barn, the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire (an obvious reference to the fire of hell; cf. Isa. 66:24; Mk. 9:43-44). b) In explaining the Pentecost event, Peter explicitly ties the coming of the Holy Spirit to the coming of the Lord in judgment by quoting Joel 2:28 ff. The coming of the Spirit results not only in signs but also leads to judgment (Ac. 2:19-20). The exalted Messiah sends His Spirit to divide mankind, to render blessings and cursings to those who receive or reject the king. Those who are in Christ are baptized with the Spirit and protected from judgment.

The coming of the Spirit is intimately tied to the coming of the kingdom of God and the radical antithesis this brings between the sons of the kingdom and the children of darkness. Note how Jesus describes His ministry in terms of bringing conflict and division among men. “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Lk. 12:49-53). Our Lord states that the conflict and division does not begin in earnest until His work of redemption is completed (vs. 49-50). After Jesus is exalted, sends the Holy Spirit and gospel preaching begins on a grand scale, a great period of separation, conflict, persecution and historical judgments begins. The ruler over the kings of the earth is progressively separating the wheat from the chaff by means of the Holy Spirit.

(2) The most information regarding the coming of the Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospels is found in the gospel of John. In John’s gospel we learn that Jesus prepared the disciples for the outpouring of the Spirit. This teaching not only involved prophetic statements but contained detailed instructions regarding the Spirit’s nature and role. Note the following passages: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn. 14:15-18). “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn. 14:25-26).

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you (Jn. 16:7-15).

It is toward the close of His earthly ministry that our Lord begins a series of references to the Holy Spirit. He is preparing His disciples for His physical absence. He says, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you” (Jn. 14:25). “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (15:18). “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (16:7). Christ wants to reassure His followers that when He departs He will not leave them alone, but will send them His special presence—the Holy Spirit. There are many things that can be learned about the Holy Spirit from these and other related passages.

(1) The Holy Spirit comes by the intercession of Christ. “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (14:16). Ryle’s paraphrase of

this passage is instructive. He writes: “When I go to heaven I will ask the Father to give you another friend and helper, to be with you and support you in my stead, and never leave you as I do.”⁶ Although the coming of the Holy Spirit was appointed in the eternal counsels of the Triune God, the secondary agency of the intercession of the Messiah has an important role to play in this great redemptive event. The future tense (“I will pray”) indicates that Jesus will ask the Father in person after His bodily resurrection. Our Lord will ask the Father to reward His obedience unto death by empowering His church for godly dominion. This passage is trinitarian to the core (the Son prays, the Father gives, the Holy Spirit comforts) and assumes the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force.

(2) The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father that comes through the Son. “He [the Father] will give you another Helper” (14:16). “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name” (14:26). “But if I [Jesus Christ] will depart, I will send Him to you” (16:17). “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [Jesus Christ] poured out this which you now see and hear” (Ac. 2:33). “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:7-8). Sometimes the effusion of the Holy Spirit is ascribed to God the Father (Jn. 14:26; Ac. 2:17), at other times it is ascribed to Christ (Jn. 16:7; Ac. 2:33). The Holy Spirit is a gift from both the Father and the Son because at Christ’s ascension the Father gives the Holy Spirit to the divine-human mediator (i.e., Jesus in His exaltation controls the Holy Spirit; He directs the Spirit unto kingdom victory) who in turn gives it to the church. Not only is the Spirit’s mission derived from both the Father and the Son but the Spirit’s task always is carried out with a special reference to Christ’s redemptive work.

(3) The gift of the Holy Spirit was a fulfillment of divine promises already made. “Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49). “He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me’” (Ac. 1:4). “Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Ac. 2:33). The gift of the Holy Spirit is called a promise because it was prophesied in the Old Testament that God would bestow it (e.g., see Joel 3:1, 2; Ac. 2:16 ff.). The fact that the outpouring of the Spirit was a prophesied event points to its crucial importance in the history of redemption. Although Pentecost has a continuous effect upon the church (i.e., the Holy Spirit comes and resides with God’s people in a special way forever), one should not be looking for Pentecost events throughout history.

(4) The Holy Spirit is identified in a number of ways. First, He is called the helper. “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (Jn. 14:16). “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name...” (Jn. 14:26). The Greek word *paraclete* (translated as “Helper” [NKJV, NASB], “Comforter” [KJV, ASV, *Young’s Literal Translation*], “Counselor” [NIV, RSV], or “Advocate” [*Jerusalem Bible*]) has the meaning “called to the side of” and calls attention to the fact that like Jesus the Holy Spirit will help or assist the disciples in a number of ways. The word “another” (*allon*) in John 14:16 means “another of the same kind.” The Holy Spirit continues Christ’s ministry in His physical absence. Given this fact the translation “helper” is probably the best in the context of John 14 because it describes the Holy Spirit’s ministry in general. One must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit helps in a variety of ways: by leading into the truth (Jn. 16:13), teaching (Jn.

⁶J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Cambridge, England: James Clark & Co., 1976), 3:81.

14:26; 16:15), interceding (Rom. 8:26). The same word is appropriately translated as “advocate” in 1 John 2:1. Our Lord tells the disciples that the Helper is on the way to comfort them and give them hope as they are about to enter a time of heartache, trial and expansive ministry. The fact that the “Helper” abides with us and in us should give us great hope as we face the future.

Second, the Holy Spirit is identified as the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:17; 16:13). The Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is truth itself. Jesus had just identified Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). He had just said that He is sending another a Helper of the same kind. The Triune God is the truth and foundation for all meaning, knowledge and ethics. In this passage the emphasis is on the Holy Spirit’s ministry of communicating the truth. The “Spirit of truth” conveys the meaning that it is “the Spirit who communicates the truth.” It is the Holy Spirit who gave the church the written word (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16) of which Jesus said, “Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). It was the Holy Spirit that worked in the apostles and their close associates to infallibly interpret the person and work of Christ. “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 The. 2:13).

Our Lord told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit brought all the historical details of Jesus’ life and teaching to the apostles’ minds and also gave them the inspired interpretation of these redemptive events. It is obvious as one reads the gospels that there was much the disciples did not understand. The Holy Spirit was the one who came and gave the disciples the meaning, the understanding of Jesus’ full-orbed redemption.

The Holy Spirit is the one who regenerates sinners’ hearts enabling them to see and understand the truth. He is the One who enlightens our minds as we study Scripture, helping us to comprehend it. He is the One who brings to mind appropriate passages as we are tempted or as we are studying or teaching others. The Holy Spirit never works independently of the written Word, but through and by means of it. Our dependence on the Spirit to understand and apply God’s Word to our hearts and lives is total. Paul says that “the things of the Spirit of God...are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). While it is true that an unbeliever may learn computer skills, car mechanics or even an intellectual surface knowledge of biblical history and doctrine, he can never truly understand or believe in Christ and His work apart from a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only gives us the truth, but He also leads us to it. He sets water before our parched lips and enables us to drink the water of life.

Third, the Holy Spirit is identified as a Teacher. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn. 14:26). “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:13-15). In the previous section we briefly considered the Holy Spirit’s teaching ministry. This point is so important and so often misunderstood that we will now examine this topic in much more detail. There are many things regarding the Spirit’s teaching ministry that we must call attention to.

(1) The Holy Spirit continues the teaching ministry of Christ. Our Lord said, “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (Jn. 16:12). This statement indicates that the Savior had much more to say to the apostles but because of the apostles’ present

circumstances they were not ready to receive it. The great change in the apostles' lives that would enable them to bear further revelations from Jesus would be the coming of the Holy Spirit. Prior to Pentecost one not only can observe timidity, weakness and cowardice on the part of the disciples, but there also is a hard heartedness with regard to our Lord's instruction on the nature of the kingdom of God. The teachings of Christ were such a paradigm shift for the disciples on the nation of Israel, the inclusion of the Gentiles and other topics that the full revelation of the Messiah had to await the inpouring and enlightening of the Spirit.

That the Holy Spirit continues the teaching ministry of Christ is evident in the promise: "He will tell you things to come" (Jn. 16:13). The phrase "things to come" is used in Scripture to refer to prophecies of future events (Isa. 41:22-23; 45:11; cf. Rev. 1:1). The book of Revelation is a great expansion of the Lord's teaching during the Olivet Discourse (cf. Mt. 24). In the epistles the Holy Spirit gives instruction regarding the rapture (1 Th. 4:16), the bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-54), the man of sin (2 Th. 2:33 ff.), the second coming (2 Th. 5:2 ff.), the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) and the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 22).

Although the teaching that the disciples received while Jesus walked the earth had a certain completeness to it regarding the essentials of the gospel and the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit was needed to take the Lord's place to fully interpret the work of Christ and supplement His earthly teachings with the many details that our Lord did not have time to explain in His short ministry (three and a half years); and which the apostles could not handle in so short a time. Note how in Acts chapter 10 the Holy Spirit gives Peter a special revelation regarding the acceptance and reception of the Gentiles into the church without first becoming Jews.

That the Holy Spirit's mission is viewed as a continuance of Jesus' ministry is taught in John 16:14-15 where the Spirit is said to take what belongs to Christ and declare it to the disciples. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." In the economy of redemption the Holy Spirit takes the things of God (both the Father and the Son) and declares them to the church. The Holy Spirit communicates Jesus' message. All revelation proceeds from the Father to the Son, to the Holy Spirit. That revelation follows a trinitarian pattern is evident in the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him" (1:1). That our Lord gave the vision to John by means of the Holy Spirit is taught in Revelation 4:1-2: "Come up here, and I [Jesus Christ; cf. 1:10 ff.] will show you things which must take place after this. Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold..." Interestingly, the message of the apostles which is given the church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is described in almost identical terms as John 15:14-15. "That which was from the beginning which we have heard...concerning the Word of life...that which we have seen and heard and declare to you...This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you" (1 Jn. 1:1, 3, 5). While it is true the apostles were eye witnesses, it is the Holy Spirit which brings "all things to remembrance." "Because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the accuracy of the statements of past events is guaranteed against faulty memory and against the errors that naturally develop in a second hand or a thousandth-hand record."⁷

(2) The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ in His teaching. Our Lord said "He will glorify Me" (Jn. 16:14). Pink writes: "This is the prime object before the Spirit: whether it be revealing the truth, speaking what He hears, or showing things to come, the *glorification of Christ* is the

⁷Edwin H. Palmer, *The Holy Spirit: His Person and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958), 46.

grand end in view. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6) is both the center and capstone of Divine truth.”⁸ The Spirit’s exaltation of the resurrected Messiah is observable in Peter’s Pentecost sermon. The apostle’s explanation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a sermon on the crucifixion and exaltation of the Savior: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God...” (Ac. 2:22). The significant point of Pentecost for the children of Israel and the God-fearers in Jerusalem is not that the Spirit has come so that everyone can now have a wonderful experience but that Jesus the Messiah has arisen from the dead and is exalted at God’s right hand. The Christ is presently reigning as King and rules by means of His Spirit.

The fact that the Holy Spirit’s redemptive teaching mission is to magnify Jesus, informs us that any movement that claims to be a biblical expression of Christianity yet which does not focus its attention on the person and work of Christ is sub-scriptural at best. This includes all heretical syncretistic systems of salvation which glorify and exalt man at the expense of Jesus’ work (e.g., Romanism, Arminianism and Pelagianism). This also includes the Charismatic movement wherein the focus is on the Holy Spirit and His work at the expense of Christ and His redemption accomplished and applied. The Spirit’s work must always be viewed in its Christological context. The Spirit did not come simply to give believers a wonderful experience but rather to teach us about Christ. Even though the Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity equal in power and authority with the Father and the Son, in the economy of redemption both the Father and the Spirit work to glorify Jesus. The Son is exalted as a result of his redemptive obedience.

(3) The Holy Spirit teaches the church by inspiring the apostles and prophets to write the New Testament. It is important to recognize that some of Jesus’ statements regarding the Holy Spirit apply specifically to the apostles. When our Lord said “I have many things to say to you” (Jn.16:12) and promised, “He will tell you things to come” (Jn. 16:13), He was talking about the role the Holy Spirit would play in completing the canon of Scripture. There are a number of things to consider as we examine the Spirit’s work in the apostles.

a) Jesus promised the disciples (on three separate occasions) that the Spirit would give them full inspiration in severe circumstances. “You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Mt. 10:18-20). Describing similar circumstances our Lord said, “...do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Lk. 12:11-12). Luke describes such special occasions in Acts 4:8-13; 6:10; 7:2-60. In the Olivet discourse our Lord told the apostles that during their persecution: “whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 13:11). The parallel account in Luke reads: “Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” (Lk. 21:14-15).

These passages teach that when the apostles must speak before their persecutors whether kings or religious leaders they do not need to worry, or consider their answer in advance, or pre-meditate, or even think about it because “in the same hour” God Himself would give them an answer. The answer is described as “the Holy Spirit speaking,” “the teaching of the Holy Spirit,” “a mouth and wisdom” from Christ; “the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you.” There can

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 2:62.

be no question but that these verses teach that the apostles will have the same inspiration as the ancient prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Although these passages do not speak directly to the issue of the apostles' written words it is tangential evidence that the disciples would receive the same assistance when they had to explain the Savior's redemptive work and continue the book of God's oracles.

b) As noted earlier, the apostles were given the task of completing the written revelation of God. This point is implied in the words of Jesus to His disciples: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (Jn. 16:13).

The apostles and New Testament prophets had a unique role play in redemptive history. It is a great error to take passages specifically applied by our Lord to the apostolate and apply them to all believers throughout history. People who do so lessen the importance of the Spirit's role in inspiration by teaching that *apart* from divine inspiration God is still communicating with His people. People in the Charismatic movement who say "God told me this" or "the Holy Spirit said this to me last night" trivialize the special mission of the apostolate and the unique nature of divine inspiration. Indeed, Charismatic intellectuals have even invented a theory of a secondary type of New Testament prophecy that is on an inferior level to that of written revelation to justify their concept of continuing revelations of the Spirit. In order to prove that the Holy Spirit had a mission to complete God's revelation in the first generation of believers that ceased with the death of the apostles, we must consider the apostolate.

One of the first things that Jesus did in His ministry was to choose twelve apostles (Lk. 6:13-16). The term *apostle* indicates that the twelve had authority to act on behalf of Jesus. The number twelve implies that the apostolate will form the foundation of the New Covenant people of God (see Rev. 21:14; Eph. 2:20). This select group of men was to be eyewitness of the Savior's words and deeds as well as disciples so that in the future they would be Spirit inspired witnesses and emissaries. Indeed, a prerequisite of being an apostle was to have seen the resurrected Christ (Ac. 1:21-22; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1). Jesus spent three and half years preparing the apostles for the time when He would no longer be with them, when the Holy Spirit would lead the church through their ministry (Jn. 14:25; 15:18; 16:7, 13-15). Our Lord promised these men a special enablement of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 10:18-20; Mk. 13:11; Lk. 12:11-12; 21:14-15; Jn. 14:25-26; 15:16-17; 16:13-15). The apostles were given a special foundational ministry and the authority to carry out their calling. They, along with the New Testament prophets, founded the church and completed the canon of Scripture. Thus, Christ's authority did not leave the planet when He ascended for He sent His Holy Spirit to the church and gave special gifts to the apostles to rule in His name under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

That the apostles had divine authority in their teachings is taught throughout the New Testament. When Paul writes the Corinthian church regarding spiritual gifts is the early church he sets the apostolic office above even the new covenant prophets: "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." (1 Cor. 12:28). This verse is an amplification of Ephesians 4:11. "In the church some were apostles, i.e., immediate messengers of Christ, rendered infallible as teachers and rulers by the gift of plenary inspiration."⁹ The apostle had an authority that could only have come by means of divine inspiration. Paul even equates his own instructions to the churches as the very commandments of the Lord. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Submission to

⁹Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), 263.

the infallible authority of an apostle is a sign that a person is spiritual or controlled by the Holy Spirit. Because the apostles were the infallible organs of the Holy Spirit, to refuse to obey them in a matter of faith and practice is to refuse to obey Christ Himself. “The continued influence of Christ by the Spirit over the minds of the apostles, which is a divine prerogative, is here assumed or asserted.”¹⁰ This passage confirms our earlier assertion that Jesus continues His teaching mission through the Holy Spirit who specially gifted the New Testament apostles and prophets. Paul is conscious of this fact when he writes: “...since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you” (2 Cor. 13:3). As a messenger of Jesus who speaks Christ’s own words, the apostles’ commands had universal authority in the church. “And so I ordain in all the churches” (1 Cor. 7:17).

c) The Bible specifically teaches that the apostles and New Testament prophets were organs of divine revelation. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory...These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:7, 13). The apostles set forth wisdom derived from God, teaching which cannot be discovered by human reason. The apostles were taught by the Holy Spirit and thus even the choice of words they used when writing Scripture was ultimately made by the Spirit of God. Paul writes: “by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:3-5). “The apostles and prophets of the new dispensation were the only classes of inspired men; the former being the permanent, the latter the occasional organs of the Spirit. They therefore were the only recipients of direct revelations.”¹¹ The apostles’ instructions whether oral or written were from God. Their teaching is every bit as authoritative as the OT Scriptures. “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations” (Rom. 16:25-26).

When Paul opened an epistle with “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1) or Paul...called to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1) or “Paul an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ...)” (Gal. 1:1), he was announcing his apostolic authority at the very beginning of his letter. Only a person with full inspiration could thank God “because when you [the Christians in Thessalonica] received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God” (1 Th. 2:13). After warning the Thessalonian believers of the need for sexual purity, Paul writes: “Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Th. 4:8). The apostle’s words hearken us back to Jesus’ own words in Luke 10:16: “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” To disregard Paul’s words is to disregard God Himself. Thus, one should not be surprised to find that the apostle Peter places Paul’s epistles in the same class as the Old Testament Scriptures. “Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

¹⁰ Ibid, 307.

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1854]), 113-114.

d) The New Testament explicitly teaches that the writings of the apostles and new covenant prophets are inspired by God. After Paul warns Timothy regarding his duty as a pastor and various problems in the church he writes: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Greek word translated “inspired by God” (*theopneustos*) is a compound word which contains the word for God (*theos*) and the verb for breathe (*pneo*). The word literally means “God-breathed.” All Scripture comes into being by the creative breath of the Almighty. Scholars call this divine-spiration. The divine breath refers to the Spirit of God who guided the human authors of the Bible in such a manner that they wrote exactly what God wanted. The apostles’ doctrine was the breath of Christ. “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn. 20:21-22).

The veracity of the apostolic testimony is assured because they were carried along by the Spirit of God as they wrote the New Testament. Peter gives us conclusive information regarding this issue. “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:16-21 KJV). Peter says that he was on the mount and personally saw the majesty of Christ. He even heard God’s voice from heaven. Yet he says that prophecy or Scripture is more sure, certain, reliable or trustworthy than his own visual and auditory recollection of those amazing events. In this passage the apostle recognizes two realities. On the one hand he understands the frailty of the senses and memory in fallen man. Anyone familiar with court proceedings knows that eyewitness testimony is often unreliable. Further, people who witness various events have the problem of fading memories. Often, an event is remembered in a general manner and the details are lost or confused. On the other hand Peter recognizes the perfection of Scripture. As Jesus had promised in John 14:26 (“He will bring to your remembrance all things...”), the Holy Spirit guaranteed the accuracy of historical events as well as the theological interpretation of those events. Thus, Scripture is totally trustworthy. We can place our faith in God’s Word without any reservations.

The apostle explains why this is true when he discusses the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 should be translated, “No written prophecy ever came into being by any individual’s setting it free, [or, more literally,] by private release.”¹² The Greek word translated “interpretation” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV) *epiluseōs* in the context of this particular passage means “to loose, set free or release.” Thus Peter is not discussing a believer’s ability to interpret the Bible but rather is saying that Scripture did not come into existence by human volition. “The following verse, given as an explanation of the assertion, makes this perfectly clear.”¹³ The Holy Spirit initiates divine inspiration and moves the human authors to speak or write God’s Word. In other words the apostles and prophets were the instruments by which the Spirit wrote.

¹²Gordon H. Clark, *The Holy Spirit* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1993), 30.

¹³Ibid, 29.

Although the apostles and prophets were passive in the writing of Scripture (i.e., the Bible is not partly man-made and partly from God. It is wholly brought into being by God's will and is one hundred percent the very words of God), that does not mean that the Spirit merely dictated the words of Scripture to the men who then wrote them down. On the contrary the Holy Spirit used the author's will, individuality, particular style and experiences in such a manner that while Paul, John, Matthew, Luke or Mark wrote what they wanted to write with their own peculiarities, the final product down to the exact wording was fully inspired and without error. "At the same time the authors were 100 percent passive, they were also 100 percent active. They were not forced to write passages against their wills, any more than an unbeliever is forced to believe against his will."¹⁴

The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Scripture is of fundamental importance, for the inscripturated Word is the only source of absolute truth for faith and life for the church in all subsequent generations. Indeed, without the Bible we would have no certain knowledge regarding God or salvation at all. The Holy Spirit has provided an all sufficient, absolute, authoritative standard in a world of paganism, idolatry, relativism and ethical chaos. The Holy Scriptures are the sword that proceeds from Christ's mouth by which He conquers all nations. When the church faithfully preaches the gospel and teaches the whole counsel of God, she continues the ministry of Christ.

e) The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit's special revelational ministry in the apostles and the New Testament prophets was foundational and ceased after the completion of the canon. "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). The verb "having been built upon" (*epoikodomethentes*) indicates a foundation already laid. The foundation is completed and obviously cannot be laid again. However, the church which rests on that foundation is presently "growing" (*auxei*) and is "being built together" (*sunokomeisthe*) on that foundation. The church, unlike the foundation, continues to grow.

The fact that the Spirit's ministry of special revelation has ceased is evident in Scripture in a number of ways. First, the Bible teaches that the giving of special revelation is accompanied by special sign gifts. The author of Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb. 2:3-4)? This passage refers to those who heard Christ—the apostles. When Paul and Barnabas preached, the Lord, "was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Ac. 14:3; Barnabas is called an apostle in v. 14). Paul tells the Corinthians that the miracles he performed proved his apostolic authority. "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). Indeed, a discernable pattern of signs or miracles as authenticators of a prophet's new revelations from God are found throughout the Bible (read, Ex. 4:5; 1 Kgs. 17:24; Jn. 3:2; 9:30, 33; 10:25; Mt. 9:6; 14:33; 12:38-40; Ac. 2:22). If there were still genuine prophets and apostles among us setting forth new revelations of the Spirit, there would also be the accompanying signs. Obviously (at least to an objective observer), there are no genuine sign workers alive today.

¹⁴Edwin H. Palmer, *The Holy Spirit*, 50.

Second, the Bible teaches that the special revelational gifts have ceased. “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:8-12 NASB). In this section of Scripture Paul contrasts love, which is useful forever, to various modes of revelation, which serve a purpose and then are done away. These modes of revelation which are partial or piecemeal are to be replaced by that which is “perfect.” Some interpreters regard the “perfect” that replaces the partial as Jesus Christ Himself when He returns at His second coming. If this interpretation is true then it would appear that the revelatory gifts are to last from Pentecost to the second advent. This interpretation, however, must be rejected for the following reasons. First, our Lord told the apostles that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to complete His teaching mission. The Spirit would “guide them into all truth” (Jn. 16:13) and “bring all things to remembrance” (Jn. 14:26). It doesn’t make a lot of sense to argue that we must wait for the second coming when our redemption is complete to receive the finality of revelation regarding Jesus’ work. Second, in the passage under discussion there is an antithetic parallel between the “partial” (i.e., various modes of revelation) and the “perfect.” Given the fact that Paul has set up a parallel or contrast between the piecemeal revelations and the perfect revelation, it makes perfect sense to interpret the perfect as the completed canon of Scripture (the finished NT). Paul is looking forward to the completion of the revelatory process of God. Third, it is an historical fact that all modes of special revelation did cease with the death of the apostles and the completion of the New Testament. Believers living in the present (A.D. 2002) have the exact same number of New Testament books as Christians living in A.D. 67 or (if one takes a late date for the book of Revelation) A.D. 96. Indeed, the perfect did come and it is still with us. Since we have a completed canon, and since the Bible is all we need for salvation, life and godliness, what purpose would modern tongues and prophecy serve?

Some people are convinced that the perfect refers to Jesus at the second advent by the expression “face to face” in verse 12. The idea is that we will see the Lord face to face. Although this interpretation is popular, it is based on sloppy exegesis. The parallel that Paul sets up in verse 12 is *not* between being able to see Jesus and not being able to look at the Lord, but rather looking at a mirror *darkly* (*en ainigmati*), that is a mirror of inferior quality (only people of wealth could afford mirrors of fine quality in the ancient world. Mirrors of inferior quality could make the face look distorted) and looking directly at a person’s face (“face to face” is an adverbial phrase without an object). Therefore, Paul is not making a point about any particular face.). Paul is simply contrasting that which is incomplete and therefore “dim” or unclear with that which is complete and clear. This interpretation is confirmed by Paul’s own explanation in the second half of verse 12 where the “dim mirror” is set in parallel with “know in part” and “face to face” is set in parallel with “know fully.” Further, if the decisive factor in receiving a full revelation of Jesus’ redemption was meeting Him in person, then our Lord would not have said to the apostles: “It is your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (Jn. 16:7).

(4) The Holy Spirit’s teaching mission does not end with the completion of the canon but continues throughout history as the Spirit enlightens or illuminates the minds of the entire household of faith. The Holy Spirit not only raises the spiritually dead and enables them to

behold Christ and His saving power in regeneration, but also continually works in believers enabling them to understand the Bible, then applies it to their hearts. Before conversion “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). As Isaiah says, “All your children shall be taught of the LORD” (54:13). The Westminster Confession affirms this reality when it says, “Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word” (1:6).

The illumination of the Spirit is so crucial to God’s redemptive recreation that Paul compares the Spirit’s revelation of believers to the original creation of light in the book of Genesis. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). For Paul, the knowledge of God in Christ is not a mere matter of intellectual apprehension, but consists in Spirit-given discernment and understanding. When the apostle John was battling the false knowledge of the Gnostics, he wrote: “But you [true believers] have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 Jn. 2:20). In contradistinction to the Gnostics who teach heresy, Christians are given the Holy Spirit by Christ and thus have a true and experimental knowledge of spiritual things. Thus, “he who is spiritual judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). It makes sense that the author of Scripture would also ultimately be its own interpreter and applier.

The Spirit of God has both an objective and subjective teaching ministry. He works in and through the Bible which is objective truth. He speaks in Scripture. The Word comes into being by His inspiration. The Holy Spirit also works subjectively illuminating divine revelation. He gives both understanding and faith toward God’s Word. In believers and believers alone divine revelation (objective truth) is accompanied by the Spirit’s illuminating presence (an interior divine witness). These two aspects of the Spirit’s ministry (the external and internal) are never separated in the work of redemption and sanctification. (The only possible exception would be regenerate infants who die in infancy.) The Holy Spirit doesn’t mystically communicate or sanctify believers apart from special revelation. Also, no one can have saving knowledge of Christ or truly understand the Bible or have an experimental communication of the Word apart from the Spirit’s power.

It is true that people can attain a certain intellectual knowledge regarding spiritual things. They can learn names, dates, events and even the various doctrines of the Bible. However, apart from the Spirit’s saving and transforming power, such a knowledge only leads to greater condemnation of the sinner for it does not produce faith and obedience. Indeed, no amount of study will produce spiritual results unless the Spirit is pleased to bless and apply God’s truth to the heart of an individual. A saving knowledge is not a mere intellectual assent to certain propositions, but is a Spirit-imparted knowledge. “It not only has God for its Object, but God for its Author. There not only must be a knowledge of spiritual things, but a *spiritual* knowledge of the same.”¹⁵ Thus, as we study God’s Word we ought to continually pray: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law” (Ps. 119:18). Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” (Eph. 1:17-18).

¹⁵Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 101.

(5) When the Holy Spirit comes He will “convict the world.” “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11). Before our Lord tells the apostles of the Spirit’s ministry in relation to them and the church, He describes the Spirit’s work in relation to the world. This sentence is difficult to understand and thus commentators are of two very different opinions as to what it precisely means. The most common interpretation is that Jesus is describing the ordinary interpretation of the Holy Spirit in saving sinners out of the world. He convicts or convinces people that they are sinners. He then convinces people that they need the righteousness of Christ if they are to be saved. Finally, He convinced them about the judgment to come; that because of this judgment a life of holiness and service to the Savior is necessary. To summarize: “The Spirit anticipates and makes effective the ministry of the disciples in carrying the message to unbelievers.”¹⁶ While it is certainly true that the Holy Spirit does all three of these things and that no one can be convinced of his own sin and need of the Lord’s perfect righteousness without a supernatural work of the Spirit, it is doubtful that this is the point of Jesus’ word in this passage.

A much more likely interpretation is that our Lord is describing the Spirit’s prosecuting ministry. While the Holy Spirit is the “Helper” of the church who helps believers in a variety of ways, His work toward the world is that of a counsel for the prosecution. “In both respects he duplicates the work of Jesus: Jesus had been his disciples’ helper while he was with them, and at the same time his presence and witness in the world had served as an indictment of those who closed their minds to his message.”¹⁷

That the “conviction” or “reproof” is not an internal work in the heart but rather an external indictment is evident by the following points.

a) The word *elencho* translated as “convict” (NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV) or “reprove” (KJV) or “convince” (RSV) means (depending on the context) expose, refute, convict or convince. In the gospel of John it is always used in an objective sense meaning “expose a convict.” John 3:20 reads, “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be *exposed*.” This verse discusses evil deeds being brought to light or publicly exposed. John 8:46 reads, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” In other words, “which one of you can provide objective proof of sin against me?” A study of this word in the NT indicates that its primary meaning in Scripture is objective condemnation or an objective exposing of sin (cf. Lk. 3:19; Eph 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2; sometimes it is rendered “rebuke”—1 Tim. 5:20; Tit. 1:13; 2:13; Heb. 12:5; Rev. 3:19. “Rebuke” is closely related to “condemn.” A person is rebuked for committing an offense [i.e., a sin]), James 2:9 is particularly clear. It reads: “If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are *convicted* by the law as transgressors.” “Inward conviction is certainly not the meaning of the word rendered ‘reprove’ [KJV]. It is rather refutation by proofs, convicting by unanswerable argument, that is meant.”¹⁸

b) The broader context of John 16:8 is not the world and its need of a Savior but the “world” as rejecter, hater and persecutor of Christ and the church (Jn. 15:18-25; 16:2-3). Our Lord is discussing people who reject the Messiah. “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also” (Jn. 15:22-23). At the end of a discussion of those who reject and hate Jesus and the

¹⁶Merril C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984 [1976]), 237.

¹⁷F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 318-310.

¹⁸J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 3:161.

disciples, our Lord immediately discusses the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then in the same discourse Christ reveals that those who do not know the Father will excommunicate and kill the Messiah's people (Jn. 16:1-3). Then again after discussing those who hate and murder the disciples, Jesus discusses the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7 ff.). This pattern reveals why the Spirit's work in relation to the world is placed *before* (Jn. 16:8-11) the Spirit's work in the church (Jn. 16:12-15). This view explains why Jesus says, "He [the Holy Spirit] will convict the world of sin...because they do not believe in Me" (Jn. 16:8-8). Note, it doesn't say "He will convict the world of sin so they will believe in Me." Their conviction is a *result* of unbelief. Ryle writes: "Our Lord is encouraging the disciples against the world by the presence of the Comforter. And one special part of the encouragement is, that the Comforter shall do for them the work of an advocate, by silencing, crushing, refuting"¹⁹ and condemning their enemies.

c) The central teaching of this passage regards the Spirit's coming and presence in the world as a vindication of Jesus' person and ministry as well as a proof that all who reject Him are guilty. Pentecost exposes their unbelief as the chief of sins. "Now an 'advocate' produces a 'conviction' not by bringing a wrong-doer to realize or feel his crime, but by producing proofs before a court that the wrong-doer is guilty. In other words, he 'reproves' objectively, *not* subjectively...it is the actual presence of the Holy Spirit on earth which *objectively* reproves, rebukes, convicts 'the world.'"²⁰ This assertion will come into focus as we consider the three-fold conviction of the world described in verses 9 through 11.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin *because* they do not believe in Jesus (v. 9). The Messiah was hated, rejected, condemned, tortured and murdered by the world. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (Jn. 1:10-11). This wicked treatment of our Lord was all the fruit of unbelief. Unbelief is not merely a mistake, error in judgment or non-consent of the mind. It is a positive evil that flows from an unregenerate heart of darkness. "Moreover, it was not the world at its worst that crucified Christ. The Jews were the most moral, the best educated, and the most disciplined of that era. With all that, they were at heart humanists and sons of Adam, unregenerate sons. The depravity of man was manifested in this fact, that the fallen world, at its best, crucified Christ, and the fallen world since continues to reject Him and to give assent to that judgment by their refusal to know Him as Lord."²¹ "His rejection, condemnation and execution expressed in violent clarity the world's refusal to believe in Him; that unbelief is now exposed as sin."²²

Jesus' resurrection and ascension which lead to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit proves beyond all doubt that disbelief is sinful. The continued presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the world is a public testimony to the guilt of all who refuse to bow the knee to the Messiah. He exposed the world's consummate sin, furnished proof of its guilt, and thus vindicates the Son of God whom the world refused to love and serve.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world "of righteousness, *because* I go to My Father" (v. 10). Note, that our Lord did not say "He will convict the world of unrighteousness." (In other words He will convince them they are sinners in need of a Savior). The righteousness for which they are convicted is the righteousness of the Messiah. His ascension to heaven and the outpouring of the Spirit is the supreme satisfaction of Christ's righteousness. The Jews regarded the Lord as a

¹⁹Ibid, 3:162.

²⁰Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 2:51.

²¹R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), 1:320.

²²F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 319.

liar, fraud and imposter. The Romans considered Him a deluded religious fanatic. But the fact that His exaltation (i.e., the resurrection, the ascension, the enthronement and the outpouring of Pentecost) proves that He was perfectly righteous and totally innocent of all the things the world said and continues to say against Him. The presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world is a continual witness for the righteousness of Christ. Thus, immediately after discussing the exaltation of Christ and His pouring out the Holy Spirit, Peter declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Ac. 2:36).

The Holy Spirit convicts the world “of judgment *because* the prince of this world is judged (v. 11).” The presence of the Spirit is proof that the Son of Man has achieved a victory over the world’s spirit-ruler, the devil. Jesus told his disciples in John 12:31 that the defeat of Satan and the judgment of this world were to be secured by His death on the cross. The ejection of Lucifer from his position of power over the nations was definitively achieved after Christ was crucified, raised from the dead and installed by the Father as the supreme ruler over all things in heaven and on earth. (Mt. 28:18ff; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9ff; Rev. 20:3) “The Paraclete brings to light that this involves the judgment *of the world* in that its submission to the ‘prince of this world’ led not only to its rejection of the Son of God, but to becoming the tool of its prince to His murder; its continued failure to acknowledge Jesus as the rightful Lord of the world, installed by God, implicates it in the judgment that took place in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Like the prince of this world, its cause is lost; *it has been judged.*”²³

Copyright ©2004 Brian Schwertley, Haslett, MI

[HOME PAGE](#)

²³George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 282.