

## DOES THE “INDWELLING SPIRIT” HELP US “UNDERSTAND”?

Many years ago I knew of a “would be” preacher who claimed he did not prepare a sermon when he began to preach, but would let “God” reveal to him what needed to be said. His presentations proved he had not prepared himself to speak. Another preacher once said that when he was in a discussion or Bible study with a prospect, that he could recall certain passages pertinent to the discussion, and that it was the “Holy Spirit” who was revealing to him a passage to use at the moment. I have heard other preachers of the gospel who said publicly that they do not believe a person can “understand” the will of God without the direct help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him as a result of conversion. I know of one denominationalist who writes religious messages, and claims that it is the Holy Spirit who guides him in this. Many “televangelists” **claim** God is telling them what to say.

Should we blame the Holy Spirit for all the confusion and contradiction that exists in the religious world, and among brethren, if **He** (the Spirit) is doing the guiding in our thinking?? Rather than present a series of logical arguments on the matter, we shall now simply look at a few passages on the subject of “understanding” the scripture, both before and after conversion, and see what we can learn about the Spirit’s help.

**Before Conversion.** My New Testament tells me that one absolutely **must** come to an “understanding” of the will of God **prior to conversion**. Concerning some who were lost, Jesus said, *“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should **understand** with their heart, and should be **converted**, and I should heal them”* (Matt. 15:13). Please note that Jesus places an understanding of the scripture **prior to conversion**. Does such a person have an indwelling of the Holy Spirit in him in any sense prior to conversion? Absolutely not, but he must have an open heart, rather than a closed heart, so he can receive the word of God, understand it, and then be converted or go through the steps of conversion that he learns and understands prior to his obedience.

A good example of this is seen in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. An angel of the Lord, and the Spirit both spoke to Philip the preacher, to get him **to** the lost treasurer, who had manifested a desire for truth by having been to Jerusalem to worship, and on his return trip was reading from the “scripture”. Philip asked the man *“Understandest thou what thou readest?”* Philip absolutely knew what the eunuch was reading, for he *“heard him read the prophet Esaias”* (Acts 8:30), and the Spirit tells **us** that it was *“scripture”* (Acts 8:32). I doubt Philip was concerned about understanding any reading material other than scripture. The lost man admitted his lack of understanding with the need of some human guidance. This guidance did not come through any direct action or indwelling of the Spirit, but through a “man” (Philip), for the teaching of the gospel belongs to *“earthen vessels”*, (2 Cor. 4:7). Philip began at the *“same scripture”* and preached unto him Jesus. From that teaching, the eunuch gained an “understanding” of Isaiah and Jesus he did not have before, as seen in verses 36-37. He obviously understood that baptism was an urgent necessity, and that one should not be hindered in being baptized, and he understood that it involved the element of “water.” He even said that he “believed” (understood?) in his heart, and that this understanding came prior to baptism. He also believed that God (in Whom he already believed) now has a Son, and that that Son is “Jesus Christ.” He came to understand all these things prior to baptism, or any assurance of an “indwelling Spirit.” This whole process confirms what David wrote, when he said, *“Through thy precepts I gain understanding”* (Psa. 119:104).

**After conversion.** If a lost sinner can “understand” scripture before his conversion, and without a “direct influence” of the Spirit, **why** does he need the Spirit to guide him “after” his conversion? Is he **now** at a disadvantage and needing direct help? NO! Paul wrote to saved believers in Eph. 5:17, and urged them to “understand” more of the will of the Lord. They had already heard and believed (understood) the word prior to their conversion in Acts 19:1-5. What Paul wrote in words (Eph. 3:3), which was “scripture” (2 Pet. 3:15-16). **Then**, Paul said that when they would “read” (that scripture), they could “understand” what he (Paul) knew and was writing in this epistle. Though Paul “wrote” by inspiration, that did not necessarily mean he even understood everything he wrote, any more than we today can read some things and have difficulty understanding, for some things are “*hard to be understood*” (2 Pet. 3:15). Prophets of old did not understand the content of some of that which they wrote (1 Pet. 1:11-12). Peter revealed certain truths in Acts 2:39, but it took a series of miracles in his life to cause him to really believe what he previously wrote, that the Gentiles had access to the gospel as well as the Jews.

When Paul said the natural man did not receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), he was **not** speaking of an unconverted man being **unable to understand** the teachings of the Spirit, but rather that the “uninspired man with human wisdom” could not ever realize the things of the Spirit **apart from these things having been revealed by inspired men**. 1 Cor. 2 is a chapter showing how the Spirit made known the things of God through inspired men, such as Paul and others inspired of God. The inspired word is profitable for *doctrine* (teaching), *reproof* (conviction, John 16:8; Acts 2:23-37), then *correction*, and finally for further *instruction* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is very unlikely that one would come to fully know and comprehend everything necessary for going to heaven prior to conversion, but he begins and then continues to learn God’s will, as he is guided by spiritually minded men and the principles of interpretation and learning that are given throughout scripture.

There is some sense in which God, Christ, **and** the Holy Spirit dwell in saved believers. Why would we need the Spirit to guide us any more than the Father or the Son? God sent the Spirit to inspire certain men to write, and the writing was in such powerful and wise words, that anyone can read and understand what the will of the Lord is. God dwells in us (1 John 4:12). Christ dwells in us (Col. 1:27), and the Spirit dwells in us (Rom. 8:9). Likewise, we dwell in God (1 John 4:16), and we dwell in Christ because we have been baptized “into” Him (Rom. 6:3). We are not “literally” in the Father or the Son, but this is a figurative expression, of our fellowship with them (1 John 1:3). We are to “*walk in God*” (1 John 1:5-7). We are to “*walk in Christ*” (Col. 2:6). We are to “*walk in the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:16). John states that our “*fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:5), and Paul speaks of our “*fellowship in the Spirit*” (Phil. 2:1). The Spirit provides the giving of truth, written in such a way as to understand it. When Paul reasoned out of the scriptures in Acts 17, some in Thessalonica “believed”, because they understood it, and then they obeyed it. In Berea, some were noble because they received the word, and “*searched the scriptures daily*”, and then were obedient (Acts 17:1-12).

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