

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:19,20)*



SECTION 1 - LESSON 12

A HEBRAIC PERSPECTIVE

The Holy Spirit: Giver of Spiritual Discernment



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The Holy Spirit:

Giver of Spiritual Discernment

“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:13,14).

The indwelling Holy Spirit was key to the victorious life of the early followers of Jesus. As those who yearned to be faithful to God’s Word, they were well aware of the futility of relying on their own human discernment: ***“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight”*** (Proverbs 3:5,6).

How often they must have reminded one another of Jesus’s promise: ***“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come”*** (John 16:13).

An earnestness to discern the way of the Spirit consumed those who yearned for the life of obedient trust. In other words, because the Spirit of God indwelled them, they wanted to *live by the Spirit* as He was guiding them. To do otherwise was to trust in their own understanding—a situation that so firmly held the worldly in bondage.

Hearing and obeying the Spirit’s voice seems far more critical to the early followers of Jesus than to many Christians today. Holy fear of the consequences of intentional disobedience was nurtured as they recalled the Hebrew Scriptures. Followers of Jesus took seriously the examples of people like Achan (Joshua 7), Korah (Numbers 16), and Saul (1 Samuel 15). Each of these men failed to discern and obey God’s express will. The penalty for spiritual laxity was severe.

Let’s examine a few examples from the Book of Acts to see how our Hebraic forefathers discerned and responded to the Spirit’s guidance:

(1) The selection of the first deacons demanded a vital criterion for qualification: ***“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom”*** (Acts 6:3). How many times have you found this qualification as a requirement for servers in faith communities—that he or she be *“full of the Spirit”*?

How would you describe a person who is *“full of the Spirit”*? Who do you know who fits that description? Ask those who know you closely in the faith if you’re a person *full of the Spirit*.

(2) One of the men who was chosen to serve as a deacon was Stephen. He immediately got in trouble with the religious establishment by working great

wonders among the people. The opposition, however, “*could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke*” (Acts 6:10).

The Greek-speaking Jew Philip was also chosen to be one of the first deacons, so we know he too was *full of the Spirit*. When persecution broke out in Jerusalem, Philip went down to Samaria and preached the Gospel (Acts 8). His message received convincing confirmation as he accomplished great signs and miracles in the Spirit’s power.

Philip wasn’t about to leave Jerusalem unless He was directed by the Holy Spirit. But when he did depart, he fulfilled Jesus’s words:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth Acts 1:8).

Can you see a connection here?
To be the Lord’s witness is a sign of a Spirit-empowered person; to be a Spirit-empowered person is to witness for the Lord.

In light of Jesus’s commission for His disciples, has the Holy Spirit in you caused you to be a witness for Christ? Yes or No? Write down how you are living as your Lord’s witness.

As a result of Philip’s bold witness for Jesus, many among the despised, mixed-blood Samaritans yielded their lives to His Lordship and were baptized. This dramatic response prompted Peter and John to be

sent from Jerusalem to head for Samaria. The apostles wanted to see for themselves this miraculous transformation in which the people of Samaria had responded to God’s Word. They also realized that in order to press on in obedient trust, these new believers needed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:4-17).

In the midst of this great “revival” Philip is commanded by an angel to leave town. A willingness to leave a successful situation is one good sign that you’re *full of the Spirit!* As the former deacon stood alongside the road outside of town, “*the Spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it*” (Acts 8:29). Because of his obedience, Philip is able to open the Word to the Ethiopian eunuch. His explanation and testimony must have been sufficient, for the man immediately asks Philip to baptize him.

But once again, the Spirit moves Philip along, realizing that the man no longer needed him. The eunuch was well-armed with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit! He was prepared to bring the Good News to his own people.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39).

Can you imagine yourself discerning and obeying the Holy Spirit’s guidance as Philip did? How would you respond?

If you responded with the same measure of obedient trust as Philip did, how would

those close to you in your faith community react? Ask them.

(3) Do you hold any innate prejudice toward others? Well, Peter did. He, like most other Jews in Israel, had an aversion to Gentiles (Acts 10). And, just as the Spirit confronted Peter, He is perfectly capable of making *you* face people you'd rather avoid.

In Peter's case, an unexpected vision interrupted his rooftop prayer time. Note that Peter set the stage for this divine object lesson by setting himself apart from household activity and preparing his heart to come before God.

"While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you'" (Acts 10:19). The Spirit's "invasion" of Peter's time and space changed his perspective. Not only was he able to interpret his vision but also apply it to his relationship with his new-found family in Jesus—the Gentiles in Cornelius's extended spiritual family!

Sear this essential point into your heart:

All humans are made in the image of God, and the precious blood of Jesus was shed to redeem *all* who call on Him.

Because of these two realities, our Father *never* allows any of His children to hold bitterness or prejudice toward anyone. Jesus warns about the dreadful consequence of bitterness against others: *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men*

their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14,15).

Prejudice was also addressed in a vivid way among the earliest followers of Jesus. They knew from the Hebrew Bible what happened to Jonah when his prejudiced heart resisted bringing God's Word to the Gentile city of Nineveh. And who could forget that the Gentile prostitute, Rahab (Joshua 2), and the Moabite woman, Ruth (Ruth 1), were part of Jesus's lineage? Jesus Himself used a scorned Samaritan as an example of love in action (see Luke 10).

Do you have any aversion to or bitterness against certain people? Name them, and the reason for such unloving attitudes.

Now ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in how you should deal with each situation. Write down what you sense He is telling you to do and follow through on His guidance.

Share your response with others close to you in the faith. Ask them to hold you accountable to follow through on what you discern the Holy Spirit is showing you.

(4) Has the Spirit ever prevented you from carrying out one of your plans? Even an agenda that seems as though it fits in with God's purposes might find Him putting up a stop sign:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and

Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia (Acts 16:6).

Picture Paul and his companions today returning to report to a mission board to explain why they didn't go to such-and-such country: "*The Holy Spirit stopped us!*" Discerning the Spirit's guidance both opens *and* closes opportunities in accordance with His will. Paul clarifies the issue for us: "*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:25).

Another point you might want to consider is God's *timing*. Think of our Father's work in your life as on a grid, like a chess board. Your piece on the board might be absolutely prepared to serve His purposes. BUT, those whom He intends for you to impact might *not* be ready.

If you hustle in to meet a need or even bring the Good News, that other person-piece on the board might reject you and your words of life. They may not be willing yet to see their need to turn from sin and cry out to Jesus! Or, you could be inadvertently serving Satan's purposes by giving aid to someone who plans to go right on sinning. Some people need to come to the end of their rope before they finally respond to the Spirit's call and look up!

Be sure you discern the Holy Spirit's timing and assignment before you step in with what *seems* right but only prolongs darkness. This principle is so important that it's repeated in Scripture: "*There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death*" (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25, NAS).

Have you ever been stopped by the Holy Spirit from doing something? Describe the situation.

Did you obey His instruction? or, did you press on anyway, rationalizing that your plan was good and that God would bless it? What was the result?

(5) The Holy Spirit may at times lead you to places or situations that will cause you to *suffer*. Recall the circumstances Jesus endured in the wilderness after His immersion by John. "*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil*" (Matthew 4:1).

Satan may come when you're weak and your resistance is low, just as He tempted Jesus after forty days of harsh environment and near-starvation. Those desert experiences are designed by our Lord to test the genuineness of our trust (see 1 Peter 1:6,7). The Spirit specifically earmarks those experiences that will bring forth trust that shines like the purest gold — *if you're willing to obey!*

If anyone among our spiritual forefathers was led by the Spirit into harrowing situations, it was Paul. For example, in order to use the apostle as a spiritual instrument to pierce the Romans, God employed what seems like a roundabout means of getting him to Rome: He sent Paul to Jerusalem! "*And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there*" (Acts 20:22).

In Caesarea God even sent the prophet Agabus to warn Paul that arrest and deliverance into the hands of the

Gentiles awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10,11). But Paul was a man of the Spirit. He was even willing to *die* in Jerusalem if that was God's plan for him.

An aside: While he was in Caesarea, Paul stayed "*at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied*" (Acts 21:8,9). Wouldn't you like to know the means by which the Spirit stirred the deacon-turned-evangelist to settle in Caesarea and raise his family there? And think about the work of the Holy Spirit in that man to be blessed with four daughters who prophesied in service to their Lord!

Do you expect for God to make your life happier and easier because you're a Christian? Yes or No. How do you respond when you're brought into times of suffering that aren't a consequence of sinful choices?

Paul was given a "*thorn in his flesh, a messenger from Satan*" (2 Corinthians 12:7) to keep him from becoming conceited. Can you imagine how difficult it would be for the Holy Spirit to operate from within a *conceited person*? How might the Spirit use your suffering for your character development?

As you can see by these few examples, it's crucial that we followers of Jesus have spiritual discernment in the Spirit's guidance. **First**, the very presence of discernment verifies that the Spirit dwells within you. **Second**, when He *is* guiding you,

you don't want to be caught "standing around watching the paint dry." Make sure you *keep in step with the Spirit*.

A final point for discussion, particularly because of the influence of Hellenist *reasoning* upon Christendom. The reality of the work of the Spirit and spiritual discernment within those who are in union with Jesus is pivotal in the age-old tension between faith and reason.

To state it simply:

**Faith (trust) is of the Spirit,
reason is of the mind.**

The earliest Hebraic followers of Jesus understood this distinction clearly. Their *Spirit-borne faith* stirred them to obey His impulse in His power. The same indwelling Holy Spirit continues to make it POSSIBLE for all who trust Jesus to live by trust in Him and to obey through spiritual discernment of His will and His timing.

Dependence on *reasoning* causes you to rely on your mental ability to analyze, not on your spirit's discernment in response to the Holy Spirit. Reasoning, and its counterpart, rationalization, have to *understand*, or *weigh the pros and cons* before action is taken. But intellectual grasp and spiritual discernment have nothing in common. The former is of the mind, the latter of the Spirit.

Walking in dependence on spiritual discernment creates a problem for you as you interact with those enmeshed in the world's values, goals and ways. As 1 Corinthians 2:13,14 declares, people without the Spirit *can't* understand you. While followers of Jesus, indwelt by the Spirit, seek to discern, the person without the spirit is trying to grasp with his mind. Just as oil with water, there will ALWAYS be misunderstanding between

those who don't have the Spirit and those who do.

There is real beauty in realizing that as a follower of Jesus, you're *able* through the Holy Spirit—and welcomed with loving warmth!—to interact with the unseen Godhead through *your* spirit. And that spiritual connection is what makes your faith viable, strong and readily obedient. You have a Spirit-to-spirit relationship. Now that's high-speed access! But this union is impossible for a person in whom there is NO indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Spirit-to-spirit connection in a follower of Jesus produces a noticeable difference in your life. The Spirit of God brings about a lifestyle of choices and motivation that are completely different from the world's! Be encouraged by the path of love-grounded obedient trust that overflows the pages of the Book of Acts!

On a continuum of faith versus reason, where would you place yourself in relation to your response to the Holy Spirit?

Faith +10+9+8+7+6+5+4+3+2+1<0>1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 Reason

Where would those in the faith who know you well put you? Ask them to comment on their input with examples.

Please read thoughtfully the following poem that was given to us by our dear friend and spiritual father, Frank Murray. We received this at a very difficult time in our walk with Jesus, and it strengthened our hearts.

STEP BY STEP

“As thou goest, step by step I will open the way before thee” (Proverbs 4:12, New Translation).

Child of My love, fear not the unknown morrow,
Dread not the new demand life makes of thee;
Thy ignorance doth hold no cause for sorrow,
Since what thou knowest not is known to Me.

Thou canst not see today the hidden meaning
Of My Command, but thou the light shalt gain;
Walk on in faith, upon My promise leaning,
And as thou goest, all shall be made plain.

One step thou seest — then go forward boldly,
One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee,
For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.

Stand not in fear, thine adversaries counting,
Dare every peril, save to disobey;
Thou shalt march on, all obstacles surmounting,
For I, the Strong, will open up the way.

Wherefore go gladly to the task assigned thee,
Having My promise, needing nothing more
Than just to know, where'er the future find thee,
In all thy journeying I go before.

Frank J. Exley

Our Lord gives His children only *one step of guidance* at a time. If you're looking for the whole plan to be laid out for you, stop. One step is far enough for anyone's faith to see. Take that step before you seek the next step on your life journey.

Your spiritual discernment and obedient trust are critical indicators of your faith as a reality. Describe yourself in light of your willingness to obey the Holy Spirit. How are you in taking just one step of faith? Be as complete as you can.
