

CHAPTER FOUR: GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

4.1 THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD WITH US

The opening statements are intended to make some basic affirmations.

- 1) The Holy Spirit is fully equal and fully one with God the Father and God the Son.
- 2) While God is the creator and Christ is our human brother, the Spirit is the spiritual creator and re-creator (the Lord and Giver of life).
- 3) Wherever and whenever goodness and justice are found in the world, the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit is the invisible presence and influence of God.
- 4) Wherever and whenever people are convicted of their sin and whenever and wherever they are drawn to Christ, the Holy Spirit is at work.
- 5) Wherever and whenever the church is active and alive as the hands, feet and heart of Christ, the Holy Spirit is at work.

What about forgiveness as the work of the Holy Spirit?

4.2 THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES PEOPLE TO BELIEVE

The first statement emphasizes the Spirit's work in convicting people of their need to repent and turn to God, and to recognize God's truth in Christ. Receiving the good news of the gospel is not about an act of the will or a simple choice we make. We need to be inspired, convicted and empowered from within. This is the work of the Spirit.

Why does the Spirit work in some and not others? Is there something we're responsible for? Why do some not recognize Christ as the revelation of God?

The second statement emphasizes the Spirit's ongoing work of accompanying us on our journey of faith. This journey can be and often is an up and down movement. We cannot control much of what happens and what comes in our lives. But the fact that God continues to be a companion is the work of the Spirit, even when we sometimes wonder whether God is there.

Why do some people lose their faith in times of trouble? Has the Holy Spirit abandoned them?

4.3 THE HOLY SPIRIT FORMS AND EQUIPS THE CHURCH

These statements are directed more specifically to those in the church.

The Spirit is a unifier who builds community and brings hearts to conviction about Christ as the way, the truth and the life.

The Holy Spirit drives us to truth, even when the truth can disturb and judge us as individuals and as the church.

The 'fruits' of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23) are listed.

Discerning and developing our gifts as individuals and as communities are the work of the Holy Spirit. A gift of the Holy Spirit is always aimed at loving service toward others. The Holy Spirit is evident and visible when people experience wholeness, healing, encouragement and spiritual growth. This also means the Holy Spirit works toward personal fulfillment and development as much as in the service of others.

Have you experienced the stirring and conviction within you to help others or your own personal drive to heal and grow toward wholeness as the movement of the Holy Spirit?

Is the Holy Spirit a "person" (traditional category) or an energy? The traditional doctrine emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is a person like God or Jesus. But what if the Spirit feels more like an energy? And even as Jesus is a "person" being human and all, is God like that? Or is God more like the Spirit – the creative ground of the universe more akin to energy, an energy that is Love? What do you think?

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BIBLE

5.1 – We're told the bible has been given us by the **inspiration** of God, to be the **rule** of faith and life. It is the **standard** of all doctrine by which we test any word that comes to us from the **church, world** or **inner experience**.

At the same time, the bible itself has its authority as the **written word** only as it bears witness to **Jesus Christ, the living Word**.

5.2 – While the scriptures are "necessary, sufficient and reliable" a revelation of Jesus Christ the living Word, it is the **Holy Spirit** who "gives us inner testimony to the unique authority of the Bible..."

Thus, even though the bible is "written by human hands," it is "nonetheless the word of God as no other word ever written."

Is this persuasive to you? What role does the Holy Spirit play for you as you listen to or read scripture for yourself? How do you understand scripture and its authority as a revelation of Christ, rather than an authority in and of itself?

5.3 – This section is aimed at emphasizing the importance of reading and interpreting scripture within a community of faith rather than as an individual. It is important to develop our own interpretation by interacting with and participating in a community thereby forming our beliefs.

Does this make sense to you? How important is the church community in developing your beliefs and your interpretation of the scriptures?

5.4 – This section is making four statements.

1) The bible is to be interpreted and understood 'in light of the revelation of God's work in Christ.' Does this give a priority to certain parts of the bible and certain passages of the bible over others, especially passages (sadly there are many) that promote violence against the enemies of the people who are also declared enemies of God? What about racist or misogynist passages? Are they "scripture" or, in light of Christ more a reflection of broken human beings projecting their racism and sexism onto God?

2) The bible is conditioned and therefore shaped and limited by the 'language, thought and setting of its time.' It was not sent down straight from heaven as it is. It is a human document.

3) This also means that in order to interpret the bible and understand it with integrity, we must read it in its historical context, compare passages together rather than base a doctrine on one or two passages disconnected from their context; we need to understand the passages within the larger biblical story spanning both testaments, and finally, we need to listen to commentators past and present for wisdom and insight.

4) The application of a biblical passage to our own time and place is a creative process that requires the Holy Spirit. What do you think?