
THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - THEOLOGY IN ACTION

1. Foundations of the Holy Spirit in Christian Ministry

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Discussion:

- what do we understand by the term “ministry”
- what is the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian ministry?

Every successful ministry in the Bible was a product of the Holy Spirit. Working for God without depending on the Spirit is a contradiction. It is He who births, gives gifts, leads, anoints and empowers God’s servants.

The disciples understood that they needed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the Great Commission and build the church. However, reliance on Him for Christian life and service is not adequately understood today.

Many ministries end up shipwrecked. It has been estimated that, in Australia today, there are equal numbers of men and women “serving God” on a full-time basis and those who formerly did so, but ceased because of discouragement, burn-out, politics, circumstances (including financial), sin or sickness (including mental).

- *“My days are over. My hopes have disappeared. My heart’s desires are broken. Where then is my hope? Can anyone find it? No, my hope will go down with me to the grave. We will rest together in the dust!” (Job 17:11, 15, 16).*

Only the Holy Spirit can renew/restore someone in this position.

It is important that we “get it right” and work with Holy Spirit in whatever ministry God has called us to, in the context of His eternal purposes. He helps us see our human weaknesses, so we should not rely on ourselves, become proud, or shipwrecked by sin. He encourages us when we are down. He comforts those who are weak. He gives joy and the sense of God’s presence in times of adversity.

2. The Spirit in Jesus’ Ministry

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’. (Luke 4:14-19, NIV)

We have already seen how central the Holy Spirit was to Jesus’ life and all He did.

3. The Spirit in Paul's Ministry

"Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:6-10)

"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ." (Romans 15:19)

Paul had a lot to say about the Holy Spirit in the individual Christian believer; it is clear he also relied in his own ministry on the Spirit who had:

- called him and privately and publicly set him apart for the work of God
- directed him as he embarked on ministry trips - listening and obedience are essential
- enabled him to function in power rather than human philosophy or persuasion when presenting Christ to unbelievers in a multicultural society

4. What is "Ministry"?

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8).

διάκονος/diakonos = one who executes the commands of another, a servant, attendant, minister, a deacon, a waiter, one who serves food and drink

Ministry means "service". We are all called to serve one another (Galatians 5:13) with whatever gifts the Holy Spirit has given us.

"The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." (Matthew 20:25-27)

5. How Does the Holy Spirit Equip Men and Women for Ministry Today?

He "calls" people into ministry

"The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations'." (Jeremiah 1:4, 5)

"No one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God...." (Hebrews 5:4)

*"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."
(Romans 1:1)*

"In the last days, 'God says', I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:17, 18)

God's servants do not "call" or appoint themselves (they *respond*). However, they should be careful not get ahead of God's plan or timing (consider Saul: 1 Samuel 13).

All ministries "fit" into God's purpose and are complementary. The concept of "laity" (*λαϊκός, laikos*, of the people), which distinguishes between clergy and everyone else is not supported by the Bible. We should not get hung up over whether or not ministry is "full-time".

He allocates "gifts" for ministry, according to His priorities

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10, 11)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the good of the church (Ephesians 4:12-16), not so that we are considered more "holy" or spiritually advanced than other people. All gifts are not the same, and there is no clear hierarchy in Scripture. We are called on to exercise the gift/s God has for us, with humility, dependence on God and faith that He will use it to accomplish His purpose.

It is important we know and develop the gift/s He has given us, so we do not become proud, complacent, frustrated, envious, side-tracked by opportunities, difficulties, dissatisfaction, disappointment, sense of inadequacy, comparing ourselves with others, trying to do too much, relying on our efforts.

- The Spirit helps us stir up God's gifts, not just enthusiasm, ideas, or personal effort.

He lays burdens on his servants' hearts

The Holy Spirit creates supernatural burdens in the heart and vision of His servants, eg for the unsaved world, for individuals, for the church (1 Corinthians 9:16).

*"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."
(Acts 20:28)*

He gives spiritual authority to leaders

People often confuse natural authority and spiritual authority. Spiritual authority is not "power" or force, hierarchy or demand-driven unquestioning accountability, which can lead to intimidation, competition ("size matters") and exploitation. Spiritual authority is influence; it is demonstrated through humility and service. Headship is not meant to be domination.

When God's servants rely on human capabilities to exercise leadership they (may) succeed on one level because of natural talent, personality, education, circumstances, or positional authority (eg title), but the fruit is often not from God. This can lead to excessive reliance on networking, pride, abuse of authority, or uncritical adoption of secular "management approaches" instead of the authority that comes from God in connection with being set apart by Him for a unique purpose.

Nevertheless, the responsibility of every Christian is to submit to Christ and to leadership God has placed over them, in His purposes, and trust Him for the outcome.

Genuine spiritual authority is transformational. It always ends up with people being directed to Christ, glorifying God and being changed as they grow in their relationship with Him and with one another.

He speaks into the life of the church

"I will hear what the Lord will speak" (Psalm 85:8)

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28)

What is the Holy Spirit saying? How do we know? Spiritual leaders should always be able to speak on God's behalf to His people. However, they will not be the only conduits through whom He communicates.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2 and 3)

He provides clear direction, opening and closing doors according to His will

There is no confusion when the Holy Spirit leads (1 Corinthians 14:33). He helps our prayer life and promises to guide us (Romans 8:26, 27; Ephesians 6:18). Ministry should be a response to that direction.

When the Spirit opens doors, He produces results in line with God's will (1 Corinthians 2:10).

He gives His servants supernatural boldness

Boldness to speak in God's name cannot afford to stem from self-confidence. When Peter preached to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made him bold. Paul attributed his boldness to God (τολμάω = not to dread or shun through fear, to bear, endure, deal boldly).

He gives supernatural love for God's 'flock' even in difficult times

Many servants of God give up because of people. It can be difficult to love others when we feel betrayed or unappreciated, or our efforts are not yielding the results we wish for. The Spirit pours God's "agape" love into our hearts (Romans 5:5), which is greater than every human dimension of love (see also Romans 15:30).

He gives supernatural discernment about peoples' needs

Jesus did this all the time. God expects us to use the faculties He has given us, but there will be times when human wisdom alone will not give insight into what people are going through, or the answers they really need. We should ask the Holy Spirit for that insight.

He gives supernatural discernment about spiritual challenges facing the church

Even when others do not perceive underlying issues/causes (read Acts Chapter 5 and 13:8-12). This can include attack, or understanding what lies behind developments in individual lives and the church corporately.

Spiritual challenges are not accurately perceived or dealt with by human intellect or emotion. They require wisdom and the kind of insight mentioned already, that comes from the Holy Spirit. With that insight comes guidance as to how to respond.

He grants His wisdom, ideas and solutions

Human wisdom is limited and can be deceptive (Jeremiah 17:9; James 3:15-17). We need supernatural wisdom to approach all aspects of Christian ministry. This can range from making major financial decisions to knowing how to counsel people. He may sometimes do this through a Word of Wisdom or a Word of Knowledge.

He carries the message to peoples' hearts

Christian ministry is not just about teaching, it is also about the message “getting through” (including when we do not use words); this is a supernatural act, so that the message does not bounce off peoples’ minds or become limited to intellectual consideration. God’s Word is:

“... living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

People without God are spiritually blind and deaf; they need to be “drawn” to Him and given the capacity to hear, see and understand, repent of sin and turn around. The work of the Spirit is to make this happen.

He provides “correction”

Everyone involved in (any kind of) ministry can make mistakes or need correction. If we are humble and have “ears to hear” what He is saying, the Holy Spirit can correct us when we go in a wrong direction, make a wrong decision, or start to entertain sin in our minds. If we are prepared to listen to Him, we will save ourselves a lot of heartache, time, resources and negative consequences.

He anoints us, so the results are His, not ours

This does not mean we do not need to work for results (study, plan, press through difficult issues, work with people, put in long hours), but remain aware that the results have to be from God, cf 1 Corinthians 3:5-7. The outcome is not about “us”, but about God’s purposes and glory.

He is the 'spiritual' side of our ministry. Ministry is not a human “activity”, a 9-5 vocation, but a developed lifestyle and a choice.

“A true leader influences others spiritually only because the Spirit works in and through him/her to a greater degree than in those he/she leads.” (Spiritual Leadership, Oswald Sanders, 1994)

Summary Text for Discussion

2 Corinthians 3

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of commendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (NIV)