

The Role of the Holy Spirit

By Tim Warner

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Typically, Protestants and Evangelicals excuse their neglect of the Apostolic tradition of the early Church by appealing to the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers to truth. But the fact is, the role of the Spirit is not primarily "teacher." That job has been assigned to the elders of the local churches. We are not trying to diminish the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer. But, individual believers have no right to establish their own "Christianity" based on purely subjective means, such as some "inner voice." Paul said that even Satan appears as an angel of light to deceive believers, and that ANY deviation from what Paul the Apostle taught to the early Church must be anathema EVEN IF it comes from an "angel of light" (Gal. 1:8). Paul's point was that mystical influences MUST be rejected, and judged SOLELY on the Apostolic tradition!

We should establish what that role of the Holy Spirit is directly from Scripture. So, where in Scripture is the Holy Spirit's job description? Jesus said that the Spirit would "testify of Me" (Jn. 15:26). He was called the "comforter" many times in this passage. The Holy Spirit would provide "power" for evangelism (Acts 1:8). He would "reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment" (Jn. 16:8-11). The Spirit motivates us to love (Rom. 5:5). The Spirit motivates us to walk holy (Rom 8). The Spirit will raise our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). The Spirit helps us mortify the flesh (Rom. 8:13). The Spirit helps us pray (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit affects the conscience (Rom. 9:1), provides joy, peace, and hope (Rom. 15:13), produces all the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22ff) in the life of the believer.

The Spirit also has a part in teaching, but NOT independently of HUMAN teachers. **His role was to CONFIRM the Apostolic teaching.**

1 John 2:19-28

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

*20 **But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.***

*21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, **but because ye know it**, and that no lie is of the truth.*

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

24 **Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.**

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 **But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.**

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.
(KJV)

Notice the Spirit's influence regarding teaching was to KEEP the first century believers grounded in the Apostles' doctrine. *That is, "that which ye have heard from the beginning" — the "Apostles' doctrine."* It was NOT to teach them something NEW. John said they (who had been taught orally by the Apostles) had no need for any man to teach them. He indicated that what had been taught to them from the beginning by the Apostles, and confirmed by the Spirit within them, should keep them from abandoning the Apostolic Faith. There is NO HINT in Scripture that believers should pursue ANY interpretation or doctrine merely on the "leading of the Spirit." NOWHERE in Scripture are Christians encouraged to be taught directly by the Holy Spirit apart from the historic Faith delivered to them by the Apostles! John meant that the "unction" of the Spirit would work IN CONJUNCTION with the Apostles' doctrine delivered to them by human teachers. That is, to **CONFIRM** the teaching of the Apostles. Isn't that what the gifts of the Spirit were also for, to CONFIRM the preaching of the Apostles, not establish doctrine independent of the Apostles?

Mark 16:20

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word** [preaching of the Apostles] with signs following. Amen.

(KJV)

Heb 2:3-4

3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and **was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;**

4 **God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?**

(KJV)

The ROLE of the Spirit is NOT to directly teach doctrine to individual Christians! No doubt, the Spirit does influence us regarding doctrine to some degree. But, His role is to CONFIRM the Apostles' doctrine (the historic Faith), NOT to establish doctrine AFTER the Apostles passed off the scene! Issues of doctrine REQUIRE direct REVELATION, not merely influence. That is why Jesus picked, taught, and sent the Apostles. Precisely HOW can a Christian distinguish correct doctrine from incorrect doctrine based solely on the Spirit of Christ WITHOUT direct revelation? Does he hear voices? See visions? Dreams? Do individual passages of Scripture light up on the page of his Bible? Does he flop open his Bible and read whatever passage appears? All this is SUBJECTIVE, and is claimed by Christians on opposite theological positions! So who arbitrates between all the Christians who think they are being led by the Spirit to correct doctrine? The legacy of the Reformation regarding Sola Scriptura and reliance of each individual on his own "inner voice" has historically lead to CONFUSION and precisely the OPPOSITE of what Jesus prayed for His Church, "*that they may be one...*" It has resulted in hundreds of Christian denominations.

If the Reformed approach does not bring the unity of the Church, what about reading commentaries of the great men of the Faith like Calvin and Arminius, or Augustine and Wesley? The problem here is self evident. These men did not agree with each other. Who then is the arbiter of correct doctrine? Many Christians, all of whom have the Spirit, hold to these opposite opinions, all thinking that they have the correct "spiritual" doctrine, and all thinking they are led by the Spirit!

Of course, in seminary, you are taught to value certain "scholars" and commentators and despise or neglect others. Why? Because what really makes a "great scholar" is that he happens to agree with the doctrinal positions of the school! The "confused" commentators are those who hold the opposite positions of the school! Its all circular reasoning! There is nothing objective about the seminary approach. It is meant to keep the elite in power, and squash independent thinking, and whatever leading the Spirit is actually doing! It is all so heavily biased in favor of the schools' opinion, a sincere Christian student could hardly distinguish the leading of the Spirit from the leading of his teachers!

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox approach resolves the paradox by claiming that the hierarchy of their particular church is continually led by the Spirit, and the membership must just follow blindly. That is, "Apostolic succession" allegedly passes the mantle of direct inspiration by the Spirit, which the Apostles possessed, down through successors to the present leadership. The problem is that the teachings of both of these Churches are far removed in many ways from the Apostolic traditions preserved both by Scripture and the early Church.

The PFRS approach is the only logical approach, because it seeks to historically verify and defend the Apostolic tradition, and does not permit any deviation from it or addition to it. PFRS simply seeks to teach it to believers and defend it from heresy.

The Bible itself establishes the PFRS approach. We need not rely alone on the Early Church Fathers for our Pristine Faith Rule. The Bible does not teach that we should consult the scholars or Christian philosophers for correct doctrine. It does NOT teach that each Christian can decide correct doctrine for himself based on some inner voice, or that the Spirit teaches individual Christians doctrines by osmosis. The Bible is perfectly clear that:

- Jesus was sent by the Father to proclaim all things the Father has to say (John 8:28, John 12:50, John 14:10-11).
- He chose 12 men, and taught them "all things" Jesus heard from the Father (John 15:15).
- What Jesus could not teach these twelve men, because they could not absorb everything at once, He promised the Spirit would finish the job of teaching THEM (John 14:26, John 16:13).
- The Apostles CLAIMED to have delivered the WHOLE Christian Faith to the early Church (Acts 20:27, Jude 1:3).
- They commanded the elders of the local churches to PRESERVE and DEFEND the Apostolic Faith for succeeding generations (2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Tim. 2:2).

All of the biblical commands regarding the transmission of the Christian Faith have to do with FAITHFULLY transmitting ONLY what the Apostles' taught, nothing more, nothing less.

We can establish the PFRS rule directly from the Bible WITHOUT once appealing to the early Church Fathers. Therefore, the foundation for our approach is thoroughly BIBLICAL, and DOES NOT depend on Scripture plus anything else. However, the BIBLICAL approach DEMANDS that we investigate all remnants of early Christianity in order to DISCOVER historically what the Apostles taught. The ONLY Biblical approach is HISTORICAL DISCOVERY. It is NOT subjective (allegedly) reliance on the influence of the Spirit and sola Scriptura alone! The track record of this approach proves it is a dismal failure.

If you reject the PFRS method here is what you are left with. The Apostles were miserable failures. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would take up the teaching task for them, was also a miserable failure in teaching the Apostles, and seeing to it that the "*faith once for all delivered to the saints*" was passed on to the post-Apostolic Church! The body of Christ was a total flop from the very beginning! It takes modern "scholars" and philosophers to figure out what the Spirit actually

was trying to do! Never mind that the track record of this approach has led to the disintegration of whatever unity the Reformation preserved from Catholicism.

The Reformed approach is simply NOT Biblical! It cannot be established biblically. It is just as wrong as the RCC approach (Apostolic succession). It is illogical and SUBJECTIVE. Relying on the individual Christians' ability to discern correct doctrine purely by an inner voice is just as prone to error as relying on the pope! Just look at the utter confusion of the Charismatic movement regarding doctrine! Neither of these approaches can bring 21st century Christians into the unity of the Faith. Both the RCC and Reformed methodologies are subjective means of discovering the truth!

There is no unity regarding hermeneutics among Protestants. Therefore, there can be no unity regarding doctrine. And without unity of doctrine, there cannot be unity of spirit. Without unity of spirit, the Church of Jesus Christ remains split into many factions, who slander one another, call into question the salvation of the other, and display anything but the kind of love Jesus said should characterize His followers! I am forced to conclude that division of the body of Christ is the goal of the devil, not Christ.

The PFRS approach is the ONLY objective approach to finding truth, and bringing about genuine unity of Faith based on the "Apostles' doctrine." The Apostolic Faith M-U-S-T be established historically. This does not mean we are using extra-biblical sources as our authority. Not so. We are using them as HISTORY. The Bible is the ONLY historical source that is infallible. So, we assign the Bible full weight as unchallengeable evidence. The rest of the evidence (ECFs) must be assigned weight individually. None are infallible. But, historically, they can be given more or less weight based on the same principles that we assign weight to biblical manuscript evidence (textual criticism).

We are not suggesting that this process is easy, or that it automatically unites believers. No matter our methodology, we MUST be driven by PURE motives, freeing ourselves from peer pressure, and all bias. There simply is no other way to be entirely objective unless you want to wait for the second coming to discover correct doctrine. But that's a little late if our beliefs are going to shape our walk with the Lord today!