

# The Spirit Exposed!

## *LIVING IN THE SPIRIT*

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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Bethany Church

Wesley J. Gabel

Fifty years ago, *To Tell the Truth*, a game show, started on television and ran for years. It featured a guest of notoriety and two imposters. The guest could speak only the truth, and the imposters lied at will. After asking questions, a panel of celebrities guessed who was telling the truth. I remember guessing along with them. I attribute my poor performance to youthfulness. If we falter in judging human truthfulness, can we be misled in identifying the Holy Spirit?

Last week we asked about the real Jesus as we discussed the Da Vinci Code. This week we ask about the real Holy Spirit.

That is the focus of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:

*Now about spiritual (gifts), brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-3, NIV)*

English translators insert in the text the word *gifts*. However, Paul is not talking about spiritual gifts. He is talking about spirituality and the work of spirits and the Holy Spirit. We do not live in a spiritual vacuum. As much as you and I breathe air, we also take in, live on and react to the spiritual. We live in a spiritual world that is not neutral. Our attitudes and actions are always influenced by spiritual beings – always! Therefore, Paul says:

*When you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. (1 Corinthians 12:2).*

Paul is talking about the spiritual. He says we might not know the mechanism – *somehow or other*, but we were *influenced* and *led*. He is talking about the work of spirit.

St. Paul teaches this clearly in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes:

***You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*** (Ephesians 2:1-2, NIV)

According to Paul, if you follow the ways of this world, who is at work inside you? If you disobey God's word, who is at work inside you? You aren't just *body* responding to outside stimuli. You are *soul* and *body* influenced by *spirit*. Your thinking is influenced by spirit. You were made to be in relationship with God's Spirit, counseled, comforted, encouraged and guided. So how do you know that it is the Holy Spirit counseling you? How do you identify the imposters from the real Holy Spirit?

Paul writes:

***No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*** (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Paul wants believers to identify what the Holy Spirit is doing. He enables people to confess that Jesus is Lord.

A woman from one of my churches dabbled in occult practices. She told me that at one point, even though she wanted to, she could not physically spit out the words "Jesus is Lord." She was so grateful for the work of the Holy Spirit who helped her eventually make that confession. However, billions of people cannot say "Jesus is Lord." They might not have my friend's physical impediment; but influenced by secular philosophy or religious ideologies, they cannot say, "Jesus is Lord." The mechanism, leading them astray, may have been their parents,

their education, their culture or their pain. Whatever the case, only the Holy Spirit can enable them to confess and submit to Jesus as Lord.

St. Paul continues to press believers to recognize the Holy Spirit. He writes:

***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, NIV)

The English translator adds the word *men* at the end of that statement for clarification. For this passage does not address all believers or all Christians, but all humanity, whatever their beliefs are. Paul writes that there are a variety of abilities that one Spirit gives to people. There are a variety of ways to serve, but only one Lord to serve. There are various works in humanity, but only one God who works all of them in all of them. Any ability displayed by human beings is a gift from God. It is a working of God's Spirit. Then Paul writes:

***Now to each (one) the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*** (1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV)

Again the English translator adds a word for clarification. The manifestation of the Spirit is not given merely to believers or to those who are filled with the Spirit. It is given, as the King James Version translates, *to every man* or to every person. It is given for the common good. Notice the phrase *the manifestation of the Spirit*. We are talking about the visible expression of God's Spirit. Paul is writing about signs of God's Spirit at work. God breathed life into each person for the common good of humanity. Everyone's abilities are expressions of God's Spirit at work. All humanity is therefore accountable to God for the ability God's Spirit gives them. They defame and grieve God's Spirit when they misuse these abilities. Until they are born of the Spirit, they have an inability to relate to God as they were created. However, God's Spirit still manifests himself, still expresses himself through their abilities. God is at work in every human

being long before we bring witness to him. The Holy Spirit is expressing himself in every human being long before we share the name of Jesus with them.

Paul then illustrates the manifestations or ways of recognizing the Holy Spirit. He writes:

***For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another (various) kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, NASU)***

In this list, it appears that Paul moves from the signs of the Spirit in the world of humanity to signs of the Spirit in the community of believers. Words of wisdom and words of knowledge can come from the disobedient and therefore the world of humanity. Do you remember David's advisor Ahithophel? He betrayed David when Absalom, son of David, stole the kingdom. The Bible says:

***The advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. (2 Samuel 16:23, NIV)***

His wisdom was not a human achievement anymore than Solomon's wisdom. It was a sign of God's Spirit at work for the common good in a disobedient man. In the end Ahithophel's disobedience brought suffering to himself and others. That is always the way it is.

Signs of the Holy Spirit can be seen in a person's faith to achieve, but even more so in the faith to believe in Christ. As Paul continues his list with healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, tongues and interpretation, he shifts more to the work of the Spirit in Christian community. In fact, he then turns his attention to the church, acting as the body of Christ with each member's gifts helping it function as Christ in the world. He emphasizes our need for one another and all of these gifts.

I'm holding two cords that plug into a computer: a phone cord and a cat-5 patch cable. Either one will allow you to access information with a computer. However, the cable provides 1,000-times more data per second. It offers you an entirely different experience and potential. How many of us have a phone-cord experience of the Holy Spirit? We almost live life as if our world is God-forsaken. Yet, God's Spirit is showing himself at every turn in our lives.

What makes many of us afraid of the cat-5 cable is that some of the content we download may be harmful. Some of us screen out non-believers and believers for the same reason. We are afraid of something unholy. In the Christian community people have said to me things in the name of Jesus that didn't stack up. I've heard harmful things from people who have a prophetic gift, and I've heard harmful things from members of my United Methodist family in a debate on homosexuality a couple weeks ago at our Minnesota Annual Conference.

How do we know that we are being led by Holy rather unholy spirit? Jesus is the pivot point. He receives the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament as the Word of God. Jesus authorizes the Apostles teaching we have in the New Testament. Paul tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed. The Hebrew writer quoting the Old Testament said, "*The Holy Spirit speaks.*" God's Spirit didn't just speak. He is speaking now through these words written so long ago.

If your brothers and sisters say anything contrary, anything that would erode your confidence in the Bible, anything that would violate the least of its teachings, then you turn from Jesus and from the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit says to you now (through Jesus' words):

***I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*** (Matthew 5:18-19, NIV)

Hear what the Spirit says to you! See the manifestations of the Spirit and test everything.