

The Holy Spirit Reveals All Things Well

(An example of Peter's vision of the great sheet)

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come,”
John 16:13.

The Holy Spirit has reserved Himself. He is always mentioned last in the Godhead. By knowing the Father and the Son we know Him, but of the Godhead He is the least exposed. Every time we mention God we are directly addressing Him, but even in the Old Testament He reserved Himself as the inspiration of the prophets, Hebrews 1:1. In all of the New Testament the Holy Spirit receives no *direct worship* nor does He demand it as He could. He is addressed clearly, but we see His reservation. That this is the predetermined plan of God from eternity past needs no explanation. The Holy Spirit does not speak to us on His own authority. He has chosen a revealing role in the New Testament. This role could almost be defined as *behind the scenes*. He has put the Son out front. It's by the Holy Spirit's Scriptural instruction that Christians can understand any truth from the simplest matters to the most complex. The Holy Spirit is no junior member of the Trinity yet there is a marvelous reservation on His part that humbles the faithful. This reservation is only temporary, much like we could say that the Son's humiliation on earth was temporary. In heaven all of the glories of God will be fully shown. This will be heaven's best reward. In the case of God the Holy Spirit there is a most precious selflessness to exalt the Son and His relationship to the Father. What great love is this where the Spirit's all is for the glory of another? Is this beauty any other than that love we see between the Son and the Father while Jesus was on earth? The Spirit loves with that same love that the Son has for the Father. From roughly 5 BC to AD 28 the Son laid by His glory to endure us for the glory of His Father. In this Jesus was Himself later glorified. The Holy Spirit lays Himself behind Calvary's work in

equal measures of affection and devotion. In His love He reveals both the Father and the Son. In this He too will be glorified. Without His presence there would be no New Testament. Without His work there would be no understanding of the Scripture today, no love among believers and no effectual Christian prayer. We would be blind, dumb, wretched and condemned without a hope in the world. He is our source; yet in all this He remains reserved. He has chosen it to be so. Let's acknowledge Him in it as we read the word.

John 16:13, which was cited at the start of this letter, was spoken by Jesus to His first disciples. Several of them would later be used by God to write a part of the Bible. All of them with the exception of Judas Iscariot were chosen to contribute to the church in their labors, but not all would write in the 27 inspired books of New Testament Scripture. Those chosen Bible writers spoke by an assigned authority from God Himself. They are ambassadors for a kingdom so powerful that there is no comparison in the created universe. To reject a Bible writer, as with any disciple yet perhaps in the strongest meaning, is to reject the God who sent him, Matthew 10:40. The Apostles are the foundation of the New Testament, Ephesians 2:20. No man can take this responsibility upon himself. Filling that most glorious earthly office would be impossible without the Holy Spirit. They would need full Spiritual instruction to teach God's spiritual truths. Those first disciples learned all they needed to learn from Jesus during His earthly ministry, and by perfect inspiration they then wrote of what they saw and heard from Him, 1 John 1:1. They were told the truth about God by Jesus, but there was still a fulfillment to come. Until the Spirit Himself personally bore witness with their spirits that God was their Father they lacked the full assurance of faith, Romans 8:16. This is the same for Christians today; our assurance comes from God. Once the Holy Spirit filled them they knew that they had been received by God without question just as Jesus said would happen. They knew that they had not been left orphans

as He promised, John 14:18. Jesus taught them well while He was with them. When they were filled with the Holy Spirit from Pentecost they continued that learning in even greater measure. No one can rightly deny that the disciples clearly changed in their convictions and strength after the Day of Pentecost. This is God's plan. We now know that we, even if we've been taught rightly, can do nothing without Him, John 15:5. Our faith is because we have Jesus Himself; not just doctrine. The Holy Ghost went to His own and illumined everything Christ taught in perfect recollection. They then understood everything from the heart, as Jesus said, "He will guide you into all truth..." This means that He brings the fullness of what Christ already taught them to light. The Holy Spirit did not introduce truths alien to Jesus' teaching. The Spirit guided the first disciples into truth and promises to do the same in disciples today. He guides people into truth today through the same Bible that was written under His leadership in the first century by several early disciples. His joy is to reveal the Son and this is always in accordance with the Bible's sound doctrine. The Holy Spirit's joy in redemption is that, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you," John 16:14. The Apostles gained perfect instruction by the Holy Spirit.

The fulfillment of Christ's promise is the revealing work of the Holy Spirit. I want to look at a practical example of how the Holy Spirit's guidance worked in the New Testament. I'll interject statements into the text to make it flow somewhat like a commentary. This letter's example is only one of a plethora of examples we could look at to see the Holy Spirit's revealing work in action. I'd first like to remind you that the New Testament was based firmly on the old. When the disciples preached under the Spirit's inspiration they knew that their Messiah was a revelation promised *from the Old Testament*. All of the Holy Spirit's revelation to the Apostles regarding Jesus was a founded revelation from the Old Testament. All of Jesus' teaching was

founded on the Old Testament. When the Apostles heard from the Holy Spirit they could see the message set forth in Isaiah, David, Moses and the rest. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant to institute the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit's revealing work was and still is to reveal this truth in detail in the church. I wish to look at one example of this in this letter.

Peter was educated in Judaism. He became a rock in the Apostolic Church. He received a vision from God that appears odd to some. His understanding from the vision of the sheet let down from heaven in Acts 10:9-16 is nothing less than the Holy Spirit fulfilling the promise that Jesus made to all the disciples. This is the practical example that I wish to examine here. Jesus said that the Helper would come and guide them into all truth. The first disciples had to see that God was going out to the Gentiles in the Messianic Era. The communication of this truth was the reason God gave Peter the vision. God's plan of redemption to both the Jews and Gentiles was now in effect, and Peter was about to see it firsthand in the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. Peter had to get this truth and the Holy Spirit, the Christian's guide into all truth, was about to show him.

In Acts 11, we see that Peter himself clearly understands the meaning of the vision when he explains it to some in his day. The truth of God's Gentile inclusion was difficult for many Jews in the first century, and understandably so. They were God's exclusively chosen nation for a long time. Israel was the only nation on earth that knew God, 2 Samuel 7:23. God did it this way, Psalm 135:4, but things were changing and God was revealing His plan in full. Israel would no longer be exclusively loved by God. God first chose Israel alone, but the fullness of the plan in Christ included the elect from every nation on earth as we see in the end with passages like Revelation 5:9.

The Holy Spirit continued with Christ's first disciples to show them the fulfillment of passages like Psalm 86:9. Passages such as this are all throughout the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets who uttered them received mysterious glimpses into their truth. The realization of such truths, however, can only be understood in the fullness of the Bible's progressive revelation when one understands the work of Christ on the cross. Progressive revelation just means that the plan of God's redemption became clearer and clearer in Scripture as time went on. It became crystal clear in Jesus, Colossians 1:26. Peter was a son of God and a disciple of Christ. He must now understand that Christ's work on Calvary was for the whole world. This would challenge his Jewish understanding, but this understanding is essential to any New Testament minister. The sacred revelation of this glorious truth is the work of the Holy Spirit. The revealing work of the Holy Spirit is the very essence of statements like, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," John 16:12. Once the disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit *they could bear the things* they wrote. They could then grasp them. The New Testament is the fullness of Jeremiah 31:34. The Holy Spirit continues the teaching of Jesus in the church. The Spirit chose, in part, to reveal the truth of God's worldwide plan to Peter through a vision.

I like what Matthew Henry says about Acts 11:1-18. "The preaching of the Gospel to Cornelius was a thing which we poor sinners of the Gentiles have reason to reflect upon with a great deal of joy and thankfulness; for it was the bringing of light to us who sat in darkness. Now it being so great a surprise to the believing as well as the unbelieving Jews, it is worthwhile to enquire how it was received, and what comments were made upon it."

The following is Peter's own account of the vision after it had happened with some inserted commentary.

“But Peter explained it [the work in the home of Cornelius that he’ll recount here] to them in order from the beginning, saying: “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ [This voice speaking is God the Holy Spirit Himself. We know this from the following verse as Peter addresses Him appropriately.] But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ [All of Jesus’ disciples were Jewish. Leviticus 11:26 is one of the many places that speaks of the dietary restrictions of the Israelites in clean and unclean animals. The Spirit, as was often the case, used Old Testament precept to show spiritual reality to His own in the New Testament. He shows Peter the whole of the Gentile world as “unclean beasts” to make the point. In the sheet both Jews and Gentiles are represented as we’ll see from Peter’s own understanding.] But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ [God is going out to the Gentiles. They are all to be made clean by the work of Jesus on the cross]. Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.” [The timing of this vision, along with Peter’s clear revelation, shows us the intended meaning. Those three men mentioned in verse 11 were from the home of a Gentile. The angel had sent them to find Peter. What then transpired in the home of that Gentile was the first outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit to a non Jew. This was huge and promised in the Old Testament. This is the fulfillment of passages like Psalm 86:9.] And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his

house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. [Like in Acts 2:3-4. The legitimate gift of tongues was undeniable confirmation by the Holy Spirit that certain non-Jewish groups were now to be accepted; that was the purpose of the gift]. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ [This is a delightful example of the revealing work of the Spirit in the New Testament. This is the promise: “The Holy Spirit...will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you,” John 14:26. Peter’s remembrance in vs.16 was from God. The Spirit is reminding him of Christ’s word and revealing those words fully.] If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” [This is the meaning of the vision from Peter’s understanding. He now understood that Christ also came for the Gentiles. Paul later exalts this truth as well, Ephesians 2:13-14.] When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life,” Acts 11:4-18. The Holy Spirit had done a preliminary revealing work in the vision with Old Testament foundation. In the home of Cornelius He revealed the truth of God’s worldwide plan to Peter and the others. Many now saw Christ’s work more fully and glorified God in it. The Holy Spirit guided them into this truth. The truth was Christ’s work for whosoever would believe, be they Jew or Gentile.

This is the revealing work. The Holy Spirit revealed Christ in and to Peter. Oh, I pray it is the same for you! The Holy Spirit is not revealing Himself. He is reserved and loves to reveal Christ in the Father’s plan.

I have repeatedly declared the fact that we would know nothing of Christ today without the Holy Spirit. What I mean is that none of us would be saved without Him. It is by the Spirit of God's education in the word alone that Christians know anything about God. This is God's perfect design. Paul later elaborates this bedrock fact when he tells us that it is through the Holy Spirit alone, in the education of the Bible, that the Holy Spirit reveals God to all believers. To know Christ you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. This produces both the pursuit for and love of knowledge in the believer. The Spirit is the teacher. Without Him there's no light. Paul declares this to Corinth. "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. [Peter's vision is a perfect example of this.] For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. [We would know nothing about God without the Holy Spirit.] Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God," 1 Corinthians 2:10-12. Those things given to us are ours in Christ. We know this because of the Holy Spirit and His inspired 66 books of Scripture.

Thank the Holy Spirit. He is no junior member of the Trinity. Christians have always understood this. In AD 381 the writers of The Nicene Creed recognized this truth and declared: "And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets." Though He demands no direct worship, we understand that He is together with the Father and the Son both worshipped and glorified. He reveals all truth. He reveals truth by the Scripture. He gives wisdom to His children and blesses them with the desire to seek Christ in the word.

God's perfectly accomplished plan is the blessing of all nations through Christ who is the promised Seed of Abraham, Galatians 3:8. We see this in the Father's will; we trust this because of Christ's work; we believe this because of the Spirit of God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Matthew 28:19.

Thank the Holy Spirit that you know Christ. Thank Him for the conviction of your sin. Thank Him that you repented from your sin. Thank Him for receiving you once you finally did repent. Thank Him. He is worthy of our thanks. I pray that He is at work in you today. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen," 2 Corinthians 13:11-14. Blessed Trinity!

Thank you for your attention to this letter.