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## Dispelling Myths on the Holy Spirit

By Bill Lockwood

No topic confuses modern Christendom as much as the Bible teaching pertaining to the operation and work of the Holy Spirit, one of the three persons of the Godhead. Causes range from lack of diligent Bible study to invasion of Pentecostal and sectarian thinking into the rank and file of the church. Let us note only a few mistakes in light of 1 Corinthians 12:1-3.

*“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema: and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.”*

***First, the phrase “in the Spirit” is used by Paul to refer to one who is miraculously inspired.***

“In the Spirit” is used twice in these verses. Each time it manifestly means one who is under the miraculous impulse of the Spirit to speak by inspiration. Jesus said that David spoke “in the Spirit” (Matthew 22:43). Paul mentioned that the gospel was revealed to his holy apostles and prophets *in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 3:5). John also declared that he was “in the Spirit” on the Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10) by which he referred to the direct inspiration of the Spirit. Even right here in the context (v. 7-9) the apostle uses the phrase several times showing us that “in the Spirit” referred to one inspired.

***Second, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave intelligible revelation—not ecstatic utterances.*** What can be clearer in the context than this? Ultimately, Paul’s point, in context, is to remind them that “testing the spirit” involved judging *what was the content of the teaching!* “What counts is the *intelligible and Christian content* of such utterances” (Gordon Fee, NICNT, 578). “It is the Holy Spirit who gives to an intelligent spirit the discernment of the holiness of Jesus” (Frederic Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 616). The entire emphasis is upon “intelligent utterances”—not ecstatic stringing together of non-words, as is practiced today in modern Pentecostalism.

***Third, to have the Holy Spirit in a miraculous manner did not guarantee spiritual maturity.***

How is this? The church at Corinth had miraculous gifts. However, they were “immature” Christians, viewing the context of chapter 12 and 13. Not only so, Paul called them “carnal-minded” and threatened to bring a rod of discipline to them if they did not correct their dispositions (3:1-5; 4:20-21). Yet, a common mantra among many Christians today is that spiritual maturity is found by having some direct Holy Spirit indwelling and allowing that to work in us. It is supposed that the *direct leading of the Holy Spirit* somehow brings about spiritual maturity. Besides the fact that no passage so teaches, I ask, “How could it be that a

church with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit could act so immaturely and yet our theory is that a non-miraculous indwelling will cause us to be spiritually mature?" The problem here is the **assumption** that a direct impulse of the Holy Spirit effects spiritual growth in us. This is wrong, brethren. Spiritual growth and maturity come about by the Spirit's influence *only insofar as we allow the Word of God to work in us* (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 6:17). It is always the Spirit only through the medium of the Word of God. If a miraculously endowed congregation could act worldly and "carnal" (1 Corinthians 3:5), the idea that spiritual growth today is caused by the Spirit working mysteriously in us apart from the Word of God seems far-fetched indeed.