

Session 6: The Witness to Christ

Series: *Is It So? Reconsidering the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*

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Introduction

In Chapter 3, we examined the Spirit's role in teaching the apostles. We concluded that the Spirit taught them all the things Jesus had said and done (John 14:26) and revealed to them the "things to come" (John 16:13). This teaching resulted in the writings that now compose the 27 books of the New Testament (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). In this chapter, we will focus on the promise Jesus made regarding the Spirit's role as a witness to His ministry, person, and work. We will consider six key passages that relate to the Spirit's witness. Before doing so, we will examine the standard teaching on this subject.

The Theological Stance

The standard evangelical position asserts that the Spirit's role in witnessing to Christ operates in two ways: external and internal.

- Externally, the Spirit empowers believers to share the Gospel truthfully and effectively.
- Internally, the Spirit enables hearers to understand and receive the message, providing assurance of their new life in Christ.

These dual aspects of the Spirit's witness are widely accepted throughout evangelical Christianity and are often presented without objection, even in non-Calvinist churches. However, does Scripture support this view? Does the Bible teach that this is the Spirit's role today? We will evaluate what Scripture says by examining several relevant passages in canonical order.

Key Biblical Passages

John 15:26, John 16:13-14

John 15:26 describes the Spirit as one who will testify of Christ:

- *"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."* In John 16:13-14, the Spirit's teaching role is further clarified:
- *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."*

These passages, part of the upper room discourse, are apostolic in nature. As studied in Chapter 3, the Spirit fulfilled this promise by teaching the apostles the things of Christ, enabling them to record these truths in the New Testament.

Acts 1:8

In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises His disciples:

- *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

This passage connects the Spirit's testimony to the apostolic witness. The Spirit would testify, and the apostles, empowered by the Spirit, would bear witness. This fulfillment is evident in Acts 2 and beyond.

For believers today, the Spirit's witness is preserved in the Scripture. To suggest that modern witnesses require mystical empowerment raises questions about the sufficiency of Scripture. However, if Acts 1:8 refers to the apostles, we can confidently share Scripture as the Spirit's complete and sufficient testimony.

Acts 5:32

Acts 5:32 describes the testimony of both the apostles and the Spirit:

- *"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."*

This verse indicates that the apostles' witness aligned with the Spirit's testimony. While some interpret this as requiring Spirit-empowerment for all believers, the text merely shows that the Spirit validated the apostles' testimony. Believers today share this same witness through Scripture.

Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:6

Romans 8:16 states:

- *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."* This verse describes the Spirit's manifestation in Paul's day, which visibly affirmed believers' identity as children of God. Applying this universally for all time creates theological difficulties, such as requiring mystical feelings or charismatic manifestations. Galatians 4:6 says:

- *"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."*

This verse may not refer to the Holy Spirit but rather to an attitude or ethos associated with Christ. It should therefore be excluded from discussions of the Spirit's witness.

1 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

Paul emphasizes the Spirit's role in his apostolic ministry in these verses:

- *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost..."* (1 Thessalonians 1:5)
- *"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

These passages reflect Paul's unique role as an apostle. Today, believers are called to study and proclaim God's Word faithfully, relying on Scripture's authority rather than expecting apostolic-style empowerment.

1 Corinthians 12:3

1 Corinthians 12:3 says:

- *"Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."*

This verse indicates that the Spirit enables knowledge of Christ as Lord. It does not support mystical interpretations but affirms the Spirit's role in revealing truth through Scripture.

1 John 5:6-8

1 John 5:6-8 describes the Spirit's witness alongside historical events:

- *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

The Spirit's testimony, combined with Christ's baptism (water) and crucifixion (blood), affirms His identity and work. This testimony is preserved in Scripture, providing a reliable foundation for faith. The Trinitarian statement in verse 7 underscores the Spirit's role within the Godhead.

Conclusion

The common teaching of a two-fold ministry of the Spirit—external empowerment and internal conviction—lacks solid biblical support. The Spirit's witness was fulfilled through the apostles and preserved in Scripture.

Today, believers can confidently share the Gospel, relying on the Spirit-inspired Word of God rather than seeking mystical experiences or spiritual empowerment. The power of the Spirit's witness lies in the message itself—the Word of God, which is sufficient for all purposes of witness and faith.