

The Bible and the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit and the Bible?

Bob Young

A friend in Latin America called me, wanting to talk about the Holy Spirit. He was seeking a better understanding about how to balance the role of Scripture and the role of the Spirit. I share a summary of the conversation I plan to have with him, hoping it may also be helpful to others.

You may have heard the statement. “The Trinity of some Christians is the Father, Son, and Holy Bible.” Indeed, some preachers of years past attempted to show that the Spirit and the Word were interchangeable. The Holy Spirit received little attention, except to compare the actions of the Spirit with the actions of the Word, and perhaps to list things the Holy Spirit does not do! The opposite extreme, seen in some Spirit-focused churches and Christians, is to make everything about the Spirit – even to the point of ignoring the teachings of the Bible.

These are extremes. Yet, many tend to swing from one extreme to the other. The solution is not found in either extreme, as if the two are mutually exclusive, an either/or option. Is there not a balance?

The Bible and the Holy Spirit do not work independently of one another. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture. Scripture is inspired by God. The Holy Spirit will never contradict himself—the Holy Spirit will never guide us contrary to Scripture. But, when the Bible describes an action of the Holy Spirit, we must be open to it.

We should believe what the Bible teaches.

Through the Bible, we come to know the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament mentions at least 55 things the Holy Spirit does.

Studying the Bible will lead us to a deeper walk with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

Living by the Spirit will help us avoid sin (Gal. 5:19; Rom. 7-8).

Integrating Scripture and the Spirit will avoid extremes. If some have excluded the Spirit in an emphasis on Scripture, others claim to act by the Spirit and do things contrary to Scripture.

May we recommit ourselves to dwelling in the Word and allowing the Word to dwell in us richly. The Bible is the word of God revealing the will of God. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit. It is possible to dwell in God’s Word and enjoy a meaningful walk with the Spirit. In fact, the more time spent in the inspired Word, the better we know God and his Spirit. We must not allow our commitment to Scripture to eliminate the Spirit from our lives. And we must not allow a focus on the Spirit to lead us away from the importance of Scripture.

We must recognize the potential danger of subjectivity. Much havoc has been wreaked in the church by the words, “God just told me to ____.” A Christian must understand the Spirit’s presence, action and guidance tentatively, always in submission to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the final record of what the Holy Spirit says, desires, and does.

The Scriptures speak clearly. Shared understandings of the church and spiritual giftedness provide supporting guidance. In personal applications, understanding must be tentative. What the Holy Spirit is doing is understood through reasoning and circumstances in light of Scripture, tempered with the understandings of more mature Christians. The Spirit is not subjectively discerned. As much as that may disappoint us, it should not surprise us when we consider the final and authoritative Word of Scripture.

As leaders, we must model a Bible-based Walk with the Holy Spirit.