

Chapter One

THE DIVINE INSTRUMENT

Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation to the human race. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:15–18).

In this hymn of praise, the apostle, inspired by the Spirit, describes the exalted position of Christ our Saviour. Jesus Christ is not only a visible revelation of the invisible God, He is also the Lord of the universe and of the church. As Creator, He directs the entire universe. As head of the church, He directs His representatives on the earth.

Christ, head of the church

This illustration of Christ as the head of the church¹ is precisely accurate in describing His relationship with the church. The church is sometimes referred to as the "mystic body of Christ." For the sake of comparison, Christ might also be referred to as the "mystic head of the church." The idea of a "mystic" relationship between Christ and His church could cause confusion, however. Even if the expression "mystic" is used in the sense of "symbolic," Christ's relationship to His church is really much more than that: it is practical and real. As head, Christ originates, sets the agenda, and plans the objectives and purposes for the church. He hears and listens to its needs. He is moved by its victories and suffers with its defeats. Mainly, however, He desires to communicate regularly with it to guide and direct it.

To accept Christ as head of the church means to accept His plans and purposes for it. It also means to accept the way He has chosen to direct it. In His capacity as leader and head of the church, Jesus Christ is sovereign. This sovereignty is manifested both in the selection of the human instruments He uses to communicate with His people and in the form in which He communicates. We may sometimes be tempted to question the Lord regarding His selection of “messengers,” who are all too similar to ourselves: human, imperfect, weak, and even sinful, as we ourselves are. Had we been doing the selecting, we would have probably chosen the angels to communicate God’s message. We would undoubtedly have felt their authority to be superior to that of those human beings who speak to us in God’s name as His representatives. Nevertheless, the election of human instruments is an act of divine sovereignty. “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Divine sovereignty is also shown in the selection of the way in which the message is communicated. God did not choose a “grand superhuman language”² but common language in which men can communicate and understand each other. In reading and analyzing the text of the divine message, we may again be tempted to question the Lord for having chosen a means of communication as commonplace as human language, instead of a thunderous voice from heaven, or through a miraculous intervention, directly to our minds. A literary critic may find the divine message so similar to human communication that he refuses to believe it to be divinely inspired. But divine Sovereignty has made the selection, and it remains for human beings to accept it or reject it, but not to change it, modify it, or try to improve on it. Again the Scriptures remind us: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

The Holy Spirit: The person of the Divinity in charge of communication

The choice of the Holy Spirit as the person of the Divinity in charge of communicating the message to humanity is also an act of divine sovereignty. In the Old Testament, the work of the Spirit as the communicator of divine truth can already be seen. David, king, prophet, and author

of most of the psalms, declares: “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2). Ezekiel states: “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me” (Ezekiel 11:5).

It is in the New Testament, however, that the work of the Holy Spirit as the communicator of the divine message is most clearly seen. Jesus Himself was responsible for announcing the important work of the Spirit and His relationship to the church. This ministry would be fulfilled, Jesus promised, through three specific functions: (1) The Spirit would act as a “witness” of Christ, giving testimony about Him; (2) The Spirit would act as “teacher” of the church, teaching His followers “all things”; (3) The Spirit would act as “leader” of the church to guide it “into all truth.” We will briefly analyze each of these functions of the Holy Spirit in the church.

“He will testify about me”

The expression “the testimony of Jesus,” appears in the book of Revelation with specific application to the gift of prophecy and the work of the prophets (Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10). However, this and other similar designations such as “the testimony of God,” or “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” were apparently popular usages in referring to the messages coming from the Holy Spirit through the New Testament prophets.³ Christ used this expression to refer to the work of the Spirit. “He,” the Lord declared, “will testify about me” (John 15:26). Here, Jesus describes the work of the Spirit specifically in terms of giving “testimony.” His task would be to give testimony about God’s great acts in the person of Christ. His function would be that of a divine communicator—to make known the mysteries of salvation that have as their central figure the Man of Calvary.

When speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit, many believers describe Him in subjective terms: a force, a power, or a special gift used to carry out a certain task. Christ, however, describes the work of the Spirit as an objective function. The Spirit speaks, communicates, and enters into contact with humanity to give testimony about Jesus. Clearly it is an activity in which the voice of the Spirit becomes audible. How does He do it? With whom does He communicate? These are the basic questions that this book will attempt to answer.

“The testimony of Jesus” in the last days

For those of us who live in the last days, it is of real comfort to know that the testimony of the Spirit did not cease with the closing of the canon of Holy Scripture. The same Lord who promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would give testimony about Him, also revealed to His servant John (Rev. 1:1, 2) that “the testimony of Jesus,” in other words, the voice of the Spirit (Revelation 12:17), would again be manifested in the remnant church at the time of the end. Fortunately, the Lord has not left His church in these difficult days without information and communication. If anyone may entertain doubts about being part of God’s church, all he needs to do is to recall the characteristics of the true church enunciated by the Lord to His servant John in the book of Revelation. These words reaffirm assurance that God’s church at the time of the end sustains and defends the faith of Jesus (14:12), keeps the commandments of God, and has the testimony of Jesus Christ. As a result, it suffers the hatred of the forces of evil (12:17). It is imperfect and faulty. The faithful and true Witness, however, offers a remedy for its situation (3:14, 19). Christ’s testimony, the voice of the Spirit, always has as its objective to remedy the imperfections of His church.

“He will teach you all things”

The Holy Spirit was also designated as the divine instrument in charge of the teaching ministry of the church, assigned to teach everything necessary for the instruction and correction of the church. “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,” Jesus promised (John 14:26). The teaching ministry of the Spirit is absolutely indispensable for the instruction of the church, because the church is made up of human beings limited by human frailties. As members of God’s church, we may be sincere and honest in our search for answers to the big questions of life, of the universe, and of salvation, but this is not enough to give us the assurance that we have actually encountered the truth. In these matters it is indispensable to accept that a supernatural source of knowledge is required. The Holy Spirit was promised precisely as that special source of instruction for the church.

Whom does the Spirit teach?

In view of the importance of the instruction of the Holy Spirit to the church, we need to elaborate on some aspects related to the topic. First of all, we need to define the receivers of these instructions. Second, what type of authority do these instructions or teachings have? Some well-intentioned Christians, after having prayed for the illumination of the Spirit as they study, then teach and preach convinced that every thought that comes to their minds—any interpretation or teaching—is true because they have asked for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It may be well to ask ourselves at this point what the Lord's original intention was in promising the teaching and instruction of the Spirit.

One of the basic principles of biblical interpretation is to analyze the historical context in which a declaration was made. In this case, when the Lord said: "He [the Holy Spirit] will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you," His audience at that historical moment was specific and limited. The message was given in the upper room, and Jesus' promises were given after having taken part with His disciples in the Last Supper. The apostle John records Christ's presentation in the greatest detail (John 13–17). His words were directed primarily to His disciples, the future apostles and prophets of His church. The Lord took this opportunity to give instructions and specific promises to His future leaders. It is true, of course, that a large proportion of His marvelous declarations and promises given on that occasion may be applied in a general way to all followers of the Lord. For example, as members of God's church, we accept and follow the instructions of the Lord relating to the ordinance of humility (John 13:3–16); we all rejoice in His promise to return to take us home (John 14:13); we all know that communion with Him is vital for our spiritual experience, just as it is vital for the branch to remain connected to the vine (John 15:15). Nevertheless, we must be careful not to make indiscriminate generalizations. Amid those marvelous promises directed to all His followers, there are specific declarations directed particularly to the disciples, who would be the future leaders and prophets of the church. For example, Christ promised His disciples regarding the Spirit; "he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13). This is a specific reference to the prophetic gift and the ability of the Holy Spirit to predict events before they happen and to communicate them to His followers. It is not difficult to see that this declaration refers to the future function of the apostles as prophets and not to the entire church in general.

The statement we are analyzing, “he will teach you all things,” may be classified in the same category as the previous one, “he will tell you what is yet to come.” At least the apostles understood it that way, especially the apostle Paul, who relates the teaching of the Spirit to the prophetic office and the inspired writings.⁴

Whom does the Spirit illuminate?

Of course, the Scripture also promises the illumination, or enlightenment, of the Spirit to all those who wish to know the mysteries of God (Ephesians 1:17–19). But that illumination always has as its point of reference the prophetic word (2 Peter 1:19–21). In other words, the illumination of the Spirit in our minds manifests itself when we open the Scriptures, not separate from them. The Spirit directs believers in general through the Word, illuminating their minds to understand it. It is the prophets whom the Spirit instructs and teaches in a specific way so that they in turn may communicate the instruction received to the church as a whole. The following inspired declarations help us understand the relationship between the divine Teacher, the prophet, and the members of the church:

The fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. . . .

The ministry of the divine Spirit in enlightening the understanding and opening to the mind the deep things of God’s holy word, was the blessing which Paul thus besought for the Ephesian church.⁵

The Holy Spirit always leads to the written Word, and calls the attention to the great moral standard of righteousness. . . . Some souls who claim to be believers have slighted, and turned from, the Word of God. They have neglected the Bible, the wonderful Guidebook, the true Tester of all ideas, and claim that they have the Spirit to teach them, that this renders searching the Scriptures unnecessary. All such are heeding the sophistry of Satan, for the Spirit and the Word agree.⁶

Great reproach has been cast upon the work of the Holy Spirit by the errors of a class that, claiming its enlightenment, profess to have no further need of guidance from the word of God. They are governed by impressions which they regard as the voice of God in the soul. But the spirit that controls them is not the Spirit of God. This following of impressions, to the neglect of the Scriptures, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin. It serves only to further the designs of the evil one.⁷

The process by which the Lord chooses to train us, teach us, and, on occasion, to correct us is clearly specified. The Holy Spirit communicates with the prophets whom He instructs and teaches. The prophets communicate the message, oral or written, to the church. When God's people listen or read the prophetic message, the Spirit illuminates their minds to understand it. Any intent to "perceive" the divine message based on mental impressions or other elements of interior or "immanent"⁸ communication without going through the prophetic word only leads to confusion and deviation from divine truth.

The authority of the Spirit

The concept of authority is, without doubt, one of the most important elements in considering the topic of divine-human communication. To be guided by what other human beings may say about an important topic is a very different thing than to have the assurance that God has already expressed Himself about that topic by means of the prophetic word. The acceptance of the Holy Spirit as the author of the prophetic message is the initial step necessary toward recognizing divine authority in these messages and, as a result, accepting their supremacy over any human opinion, including our own.

The most explicit of the New Testament writers on the supremacy of the teaching of the Spirit over human opinion is the apostle Paul. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul bases the authority of his message on the fact that it is the result of the teachings of the Spirit: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. . . . This is what we speak, not in words

taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:1, 4, 5, 13).

This authority and superiority of the Spirit over human opinions and traditions is especially evident in controversial matters. One of the more controversial issues in apostolic times was the participation of non-Jews, or “Gentiles,” in the church, and their acceptance as part of God’s people. The apostle Paul appeals to the revelations of the Spirit as his source of authority to resolve the matter: “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly . . . the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets . . . the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:26).

The apostle Peter is another of the writers of the New Testament who establishes the authority of the Spirit as the source of teaching and guidance for the church. Peter earlier had an experience similar to Paul’s concerning foreigners or “Gentiles.” It was a revelation from God in the form of a vision that prepared him for his first visit to the home of a non-Jewish family (Acts 10). When some Jewish members criticized him for having visited an uncircumcised person, Peter appealed to his vision as the source of authority for his actions (Acts 11:1–18). He repeated the identical argument at the time of the first congress of the church in Jerusalem, where these same matters were discussed (Acts 15:7–11).

Circumstances such as these taught the apostle Peter to trust the messages of the Spirit more and more and to think less of his own opinions. It is his voice of experience that declares: “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place . . . for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19, 21).

“He will guide you into all truth”

Without a doubt, the apostles were aware of the promise that Christ had made: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). It was the activity of the Holy Spirit through the prophets and apostles that gave the apostolic church

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a clearer and firmer perception, both of its doctrines and the mission of the church. It was also the Spirit who, with His teaching and guidance, warded off heresies from taking root and flourishing in the church during the apostolic era, in spite of the intention of many “teachers” to produce disciples after themselves (Ephesians 3:11–14; 2 Peter 2:1, 2).

The history of God’s people in these last days is not very different from that of apostolic times. It was also the Holy Spirit who guided the church to an ever clearer perception of divine truth for this time. Our pioneers were not exempt from the danger of heresies and doctrinal errors. Nevertheless, each time the church took a wrong turn, the Holy Spirit, through the prophetic message, guided the believers toward the truth. The following are some confirming testimonies:

At this time there was fanaticism among some of those who had been believers in the first message. Serious errors in doctrine and practice were cherished, and some were ready to condemn all who would not accept their views. God revealed these errors to me in vision and sent me to His erring children to declare them.⁹

We are to be established in the faith, in the light of the truth given us in our early experience. At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. Sometimes whole nights would be devoted to searching the Scriptures, and earnestly asking God for guidance. Companies of devoted men and women assembled for this purpose. The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.

As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study came to a point where they could go no farther, and had

recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point.¹¹

From these historical witnesses, it is clear that the Holy Spirit continued fulfilling His sacred function of being the divine instrument to guide the church into the whole truth by means of the prophetic gift. The development of the doctrines of the church was based on a diligent study of the Scriptures, but when the danger existed of accepting a heretical doctrine or a misinterpretation of the Word, the Spirit used the prophetic gift to give light and guidance to the infant church.

Conclusion

We may conclude, then, by reaffirming our assurance that the Lord speaks and communicates with His church, which He loves and desires to save. In His wisdom and sovereignty, the Godhead chose the Holy Spirit as the divine Being in charge of communication with His people. This transforms the prophetic word into a sovereign and “more certain” message than human opinions, giving it authority over the latter. Choosing the prophets, human beings like ourselves, as the bearers of the divine message, was also an act of divine sovereignty. In the following chapter, we will analyze the relationship between the perfect and foolproof message of God and the human messenger, subject to the frailties of humanity and therefore imperfect and fallible.

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1. In addition to the reference in Colossians, Paul uses the illustration of Christ as the head of the church in other epistles. See, for instance, Ephesians 1:20–23; 4:13–16.
 2. This expression is part of a description that Ellen White makes about the type of language that God uses to communicate His message, a human language, therefore limited and imperfect. See *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 20.
 3. The apostle Paul uses the expression “the testimony of God” to refer to the messages he received from the Spirit and that he shared with the believers and leaders of the church. See Acts 20:20–27; 1 Cor. 2:1–5. The apostle John uses the expression “the revelation of Jesus” at the beginning of the book of Revelation (1:1).
 4. See 1 Cor. 2:10–13; Ephesians 3:3–6; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

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5. *The Great Controversy*, vii, ix.
6. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 71.
7. *The Great Controversy*, vii, viii.
8. The idea of “immanence” is used extensively among charismatic Christians who consider that God communicates to them internally, without using an element “transcendent” or exterior to themselves, such as a written revelation.
9. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 655, 656.
10. *Gospel Workers*, p. 302.
11. *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 38.