



# Challenging your thinking!

Addressing Ideas that Influence Revival

## The Specific Leading of the Holy Spirit

By John R. Van Gelderen

Some today deny the specific leading of the Holy Spirit. Is this denial valid, or is it perhaps another example of overreacting to the excesses of others? While it is sadly true that some do ridiculous things in the name of “God led me,” these excesses do not invalidate what the Scripture teaches regarding divine guidance. The objective Word of God teaches the subjective reality of the Holy Spirit’s leadership. This is an “objective subjectivism.” There is a Bible-based (objective) realm of the Holy Spirit’s leading (subjective). To investigate this

biblical basis, this article will observe the significance of the present time period, the attack of Satan in this age, and the key biblical protection in this battle.

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### The Dispensations of the Godhead

When reading true classics on the Holy Spirit, one will most certainly be blessed in reading J. Elder Cumming’s *Through the Eternal Spirit*, Handley Moule’s *The Holy Spirit*, and A. J. Gordon’s *The Ministry of the Spirit*. Later writers often quote from these works. All

three emanate with reverence and biblical precision on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Both Moule and Gordon refer to a concept that might be termed “the dispensations of the Godhead.” These divine dispensations dictate as it were some divine tests of living orthodoxy. Satan’s attack on God’s people then parallels the emphasis of each dispensation. Note the following distinctions.

#### *The Dispensation of the Father*

The time period of the Old Testament may be termed “the dispensation of the Father.” The person of God the Father was clearly in prominence. The emphasis was on the oneness of God. Therefore the test of living orthodoxy for the people of God during that dispensation was regarding that emphasis. Consequently, Satan’s attack was on that very point.

Does not the Old Testament repeatedly record Israel’s great sin of idolatry?

#### *The Dispensation of the Son*

Christ’s coming to earth at the first advent may be termed “the dispensation of the Son.” (It will not be the only one.) As one reads the Gospels, clearly God the Son is seen in prominence. The test of living orthodoxy for the people of God revolved around Jesus Christ. Would those who were orthodox regarding the Father now properly receive and relate to the Son? Therefore, Satan’s attack on God’s people shifted to the Son. What does the Scripture say? “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11).

#### *The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit*

Christ finished His glorious work at Calvary and ascended to the right hand of the throne of power. There He received the promise of the Spirit and sent the Holy Spirit. This event launched what may be termed “the dispensation of God the Spirit,” and the Holy Spirit has not yet been sent back. Therefore, the present age is the age of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Administrator of the church age. The test of living orthodoxy today for God’s people regards the Holy Spirit. Will those who are orthodox regarding the Father and the Son now properly receive and relate to the Spirit? Therefore, Satan’s attack on God’s people has shifted to this very point.

**The test of living orthodoxy today for God’s people regards the Holy Spirit.**

In Revelation 2–3 in the messages sent to the churches of this age, the Scripture repeatedly says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Notice the emphasis on *the Spirit* during the church age.

At the beginning of the dispensation of the Spirit, it is significant that when Ananias sinned, Peter said, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to

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lie to the Holy Ghost?" (Acts 5:3). Notice Satan's attack and notice that the lie was directly against the Holy Spirit. Why did Peter not say the Father or the Son? Because this is the age or dispensation of the Spirit and inspiration here clearly portrays this very point.

### **The Present Attack: Strange Fire and No Fire**

Over the past two thousand years Satan has persisted with this attack. Although the attack among the lost revolves around all three persons of the Godhead, the attack among the saints pertains primarily to the Holy Spirit. In light of the previous point, this should not come as a surprise.

Consequently, many refer to the Holy Spirit as "it." Many attempt service for Christ without seeking the leadership of the Spirit and/or without depending on Him for effective service. Some focus on the gifts of the Spirit instead of the God of the gifts. Some embrace counterfeits of the Spirit. Satan has done all he can to keep the saints from a right understanding and relationship to the Holy Spirit.

James A. Stewart, a missionary evangelist from Scotland who saw revival repeatedly during his itinerate lifetime, wrote a book on the ministry of the Holy Spirit entitled *Heaven's Throne Gift*. He wrote this book before the Charismatic movement of the 1960s. In the book he points out that in a group of fundamental preachers, they would all agree regarding God the Father and regarding God the Son. But he continues that they would disagree regarding God the Spirit, and that the disagreement would be so sharp that fellowship would be strained and some would accuse others of false doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

**Satan knows that a believer who is not rightly related to the Holy Spirit is powerless, whether through embracing strange fire or no fire.**

Then the 1960s brought the Charismatic explosion, that took elements of Pentecostal thinking beyond denominational lines. Although there were and are many sincere brethren within this movement, biblical fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals rightly rejected the excesses of the Charismatic movement. Truly there are excesses which reveal the mark of satanic deception or show the marks of fleshly imitation. The resulting dual streams of power weaken or discredit real fire. However, in the understandable and

needed reaction against strange fire, there has been an overreaction which embraces no fire. Orthodoxy without the life of the Spirit is dead orthodoxy. Satan knows that a believer who is not rightly related to the Holy Spirit is powerless, whether through embracing strange fire or no fire.

Some today, in their desire to put out strange fire, have de-emphasized biblical subjectivism, which is the real, interactive ministry of the Holy Spirit based on biblical truth. This leads to sheer objectivism. Wayne Van Gelderen, Sr. used to say, "Pure objectivism is one step away from liberalism." Liberalism denies the supernatural, while pure objectivism minimizes the supernatural. Therefore, it is one step away from liberal-

ism. On the other hand, pure subjectivism is also one step away from liberalism. Liberalism denies the inerrant, divine revelation, while pure subjectivism minimizes it. Therefore, it is also one step away. The key is the Word (objective truth) and the Spirit (subjective truth based on objective truth). Jesus said that God must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

The Spirit without the Word is delusion. The Word without the Spirit is deadness. But the combination of the Word and the Spirit is dynamic. Some today minimize any specific leading of the Spirit and simply point to the Word. However, this ignores the reality of "communion" with the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Also, this thinking practically denies the personality of the Spirit. While strange fire (in the name of the Spirit) must be rejected, no fire (in the name of the Word) is not the answer. The key is the Word *and* the Spirit. The Spirit always works in harmony with the Word. The legitimate subjective realm is in accordance with the objective boundaries of the Word. Therefore, on the one hand one must not allow deadness to lead him to overreact and embrace delusion, and on the other hand one must not allow strange fire to lead him to overreact and embrace no fire.

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The Holy Spirit does specifically lead and empower. Jesus taught in Luke 12:11-12, "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." Clearly, Jesus taught the specific leading of the Spirit. Acts 8, 10, 13, and 16 all illustrate the Spirit's specific leading. Romans 8:14 speaks of being "led by the Spirit." Galatians 5:18 speaks of being "led of the Spirit." As the "Spirit of wisdom" in Ephesians 1:17, obviously the Spirit gives wisdom. Truly there is a specific leading of the Spirit based on biblical truth. Just because some may follow their own whims or a satanic counterfeit does not mean there is not a real leading of the Holy Spirit. How can one "try the spirits" according to 1 John 4:1 if there is no genuine leading of the Spirit? Ironically, if Satan can prompt as he did in Acts 5 with Ananias, certainly the Holy Spirit can prompt. To deny the plain sense of the passages cited involves exegetical straining.

Some note the parallel between Ephesians 5:18-19, "Be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," and Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Then they argue that the real issue is the Word, not the Spirit. But this same kind of logic could argue that the real issue is the Spirit, not the Word. Is it not obvious the Bible emphasizes the Word *and* the Spirit?

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Every Spirit-filled believer must of necessity be Word-filled. For one cannot access the Spirit but by faith, which has the Word as its foundation. Sadly some may learn the Word merely on the intellectual level, but they do not depend on it. Without faith therefore, they are not Spirit-filled. But every Spirit-filled believer must of necessity be Word-filled.

Some argue there is no need to surrender to the Spirit; that there is only a need to surrender to the Word. But who authored the Word through the biblical writers, and who illumines and convinces individuals of the Word? The Spirit. Cannot the importance of both be seen? Spirit-illumination and Spirit-convincement involves the specific leading of the Holy Spirit based on the Word. The issue is not the Word or the Spirit, but the Word and the Spirit.

**This subtle apostasy from the Holy Spirit's person and power leads to apostasy in practice that leads to apostasy in doctrine. This is the cause for powerlessness and/or worldliness.**

In all of this one can note a subtle apostasy within conservative Christianity. Full-blown apostasy in doctrine often begins with an apostasy in practice. On the one hand, in de-emphasizing the Holy Spirit, some have unwittingly begun a subtle apostasy in practice (no experience). On the other hand, some who have recognized deadness and powerlessness have sadly embraced a counterfeit life. When worldliness and carnal conduct is

ignored or even embraced as a marketing tool, there has also been an apostasy in practice (false experience). Eventually apostasy in doctrine often follows. In both cases, where does the apostasy (falling away) begin? It begins with a falling away from a right relationship with the Holy Spirit. This is the cause for powerlessness and/or worldliness. This subtle apostasy from the Holy Spirit's person and power leads to apostasy in practice that leads to apostasy in doctrine.

Furthermore, as Moule (quoting John Owen) acknowledges in his book, neglecting the ministry of the Holy Spirit today is on the same level as Israel's idolatry in the Old Testament and the Jews' rejection of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> To slight the Holy Spirit today is to slight Christ's throne gift for this age. The sent Spirit of the glorified Christ is the gift of the Spirit from Christ for this dispensation. Is it not alarming that sound, fundamental people today have played right into Satan's deceptive tactics? In running from the wild fire of others, some have stumbled right into the trap of subtle apostasy from the Holy Spirit by de-emphasizing the Spirit. Yet it is the Spirit who indwells believers to enable those who trust Him to do the work of God. As A. W. Tozer said, "The Holy Spirit is the cure for fanaticism, not the cause of it."

Others, in repulsion to the dead form of godliness that denies the power thereof, have embraced a counterfeit sense of life. Yet the Holy Spirit leads to holiness, not worldliness. When either the Holy Spirit or holiness is de-emphasized, the result is a flesh-filled life. Some Charismatics have ignored holiness (separation from the world), and therefore in-

dulge in the works of the flesh. Some biblical fundamentalists have ignored the Holy Spirit, and therefore depend on the strength of the flesh. Both are flesh-filled. The answer is a right relationship with the Spirit of holiness.

### **The Key Protection: The Word of God**

The major protection to guard one's relationship with the Holy Spirit from strange fire is the Word of God. The Spirit without the Word is not the Spirit—it is delusion. This is what leads to strange fire. "The Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) will always work according to the Word of truth (John 17:17). The Spirit as the author of Scripture (2 Peter 1:21) will not violate Himself. Therefore, Holy Spirit leadership is always in harmony with the principles of God's Word. The Spirit never speaks contrary to the Word. The Spirit will never lead one to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right. Also, it is dangerous to trust impressions alone, for Satan is a master deceiver. Biblical principle (truth) is the key to discerning satanic counterfeits.<sup>3</sup>

For example, the Word of God explains how the Spirit of God guides. First, Galatians 5:18 speaks of being "led by the Spirit." The Holy Spirit leads. Counterfeit guidance drives or pushes, and does not allow time to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). Second, 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." The Spirit's leading is clear, not confusing. Counterfeit guidance prompts in a "zigzag" fashion which irritates and eliminates peace by causing one to leave the position of resting in Christ. Third, Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit ... bears witness with our spirit." The Spirit communicates within one's inner man. This is a knowledge versus a feeling. Counterfeit guidance is from one's circumference or outer man or even from outside voices and so forth. Fourth, Ephesians 4:23 refers to "the Spirit of your mind." The Spirit works through one's mind, not around it. Counterfeit guidance bypasses the normal function of the thinking process.

A last example is in the realm of conviction. Conviction from the Holy Spirit is specific and has as its goal cleansing and victory in Christ (1 John 16:11; 1 John 1:7, 9; John 16:14). Therefore the Holy Spirit's conviction is edifying as it offers hope to those who are broken before the Lord. Counterfeit conviction is general and has as its goal discouragement and despair by accusing the brethren (Revelation 12:10). These examples demonstrate how the objective realm of the Word provides the parameters in which the subjective realm of the Spirit operates.

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Lack of grounding in the Word regarding the Holy Spirit allows Satan to quickly counterfeit real fire and quench real revival. Those who embrace counterfeits may be sincere and even surrendered to the supernatural realm. But if they do not discern between the Holy Spirit and evil spirits, they can be grossly deceived. Imitation is also counterfeit and must be rejected based on the revealed Word of truth. However,

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real fire must be accepted based on that same Word of truth. It is the Word which instructs in the legitimate and needful realm of the Holy Spirit. The inspired guidelines of the Word of God provide the key protection against both strange fire and no fire.

For many, their relationship with the Spirit is a dysfunctional relationship. Much of this occurs because of a lack of heeding Christ's own teaching—His Word—regarding His Spirit. In John 14:7, Jesus says, "If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." The phrase *ye know Him* indicates that the disciples knew the Father because they knew the Son. A few verses later in John 14:16–17, Jesus says, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Jesus again uses the phrase *ye know Him*, this time referring to the Spirit. When Christ then emphasizes that the Spirit *shall be in you*, He explains in the next verse, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The Spirit in the believer is Christ in the believer. Therefore to ignore, neglect, slight, or despise the Holy Spirit today, even if well intentioned, is actually ignoring, neglecting, slighting, or despising Christ. God's people must wake up to the blessed coming of Christ to them through the Holy Spirit.

No wonder Jesus said in John 16:7, "It is expedient for you [to your advantage] that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." When Christ walked on earth, He could be in only one place at a time because of the

limitations of His human body; but by ascending and sending His Spirit, He could now be personally with each disciple everywhere at all times. Not only would the Spirit of Christ dwell *with* each disciple, He would dwell *in* each disciple. What a blessed plan of God that Deity would be incorporated into human personality! This personal presence allows for personal guidance as the Holy Spirit bears witness with one's spirit in accordance with the Word.

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Tragically, many college students, as well as Christian workers, are being taught by some that there is no real specific leading of the Holy Spirit. This thinking strips the Holy Spirit of personality, makes one's relationship with God impersonal, and undermines the Spirit-filled life of yielding to the Spirit's leadership and empowerment. But most of all, this thinking ignores or denies clear biblical statements that set the objective parameters for the subjective leading of the Holy Spirit.



#### Endnotes

1. James A. Stewart, *Heaven's Throne Gift* (Asheville, N.C.: Revival Literature, 1956, 2001), p. 66.
2. Handley G. C. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (1890; reprint ed., Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), p. 8.
3. For a thorough treatise on discerning satanic counterfeits in the spirit realm, see the unabridged *War on the Saints* by Jessie Penn-Lewis with Evan Roberts, published by Lowe.

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