

Good Word Schedule
“Holy Spirit and Spirituality”
January, February, March 2017

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Theme: The Spirit and the Word

Leading Question: What would we be missing if we spoke only of God the Father and God the Son, but not of God the Spirit?

From a practical point of view, “Trinity” allows us to focus on three important aspects of our relationship with God. The Father assures us that someone is always on the throne; the Son assures us that God identifies with us as earthly beings; the Spirit assures us that God is everywhere present.

Our challenge in understanding that “division of labor” is that we have no way of comprehending a personal being who is everywhere present and capable of ministering to the entire human family as individuals. Whenever we speak of the Trinity it is well to remember this somewhat humorous quote from Robert South, a well-known English minister bridging the 1600s and the 1700s: “Just as denying this fundamental Christian belief could cost you your soul, so trying too hard to understand it could cost you your wits.”

I can imagine a majestic being on a heavenly throne; I can grasp the idea of a God/man who came among us, someone we could hear, see, and touch (cf. 1 John 1:1-4). But a spirit, a breath, and wind – the same word is used with all three meanings in both Testaments – is simply beyond my ability to fathom, especially when this spirit/wind/breath is said to be a person.

So looming over us all quarter will be this amorphous being we can scarcely comprehend, yet, according to Scripture, still plays an important part in our spiritual lives. But perhaps that phrase “according to Scripture” is a good place to start. Indeed that points us to the theme of our lesson for this first week of the quarter.

Comment on leading question: Would it be safe to say that we would be missing the idea of omnipresence if we did not have the Spirit?

2 Tim. 3:16-17: All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (NRSV)

2 Peter 1:19-21: So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (NRSV)

Note: These oft-cited passages actually tell us nothing about how inspiration works. They

both simply affirm that God inspired the Scriptures. The only way to affirm what that means is for Spirit-guided believers to draw on the Bible inductively, seeking to illustrate what inspiration means.

2. Question: Of the three ways in which Scripture has come down to us – revelation, research, and experience – which has the priority?

Note: If we look Scripture to illustrate these three modes, we don't have to look far. For "revelation": Daniel and Revelation; for "research," Luke 1:1-4; for "experience," Proverbs is probably the clearest biblical example. Which of these is likely to be most powerful, most effective? Should we privilege one mode over the other two?

3. Question: What is the difference between "inspiration" and "revelation"?

Note: It might be helpful to say that all of Scripture is "inspired," but not all of it is "revelation." But such a way of relating the two terms can be problematic, for when one refers to the history of interpretation, Scripture has always been seen as part of "special revelation," not "natural" or "general" revelation. Thus the impression arises that all of Scripture was given by way of vision.

Regardless of how one defines or uses the terms, however, one thing should be clear, namely, that neither revelation nor inspiration can be proven. They are claims for the text that Christians have made, guided by the Spirit. But even though these claims cannot be proven, we accept by faith the truths that have been handed down by the Christian community.

4. Question: Does inspiration guarantee the "truth" and the correct "application" of Scripture?

Note: As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 affirms, Scripture is profitable. Yet that "profitable" application requires the on-going guidance of the Spirit. Scripture does not automatically apply itself. The application is always made by human beings under the guidance of the Spirit. And the safest mode for making applications generally involves a Spirit-guided community. But that too, cannot be "proven." We always live by faith.

Theme: The Holy Spirit: Working Behind the Scenes

Leading Question: The official study guide takes a whole lesson to focus on how the Spirit works “behind the scenes.” Why is that important to our study?

Of the three dominant meanings for the Hebrew word *ruach* (OT) and its Greek equivalent, *pneuma* (NT) – spirit, wind, and breath – none suggests anything substantial for the Holy Spirit. How does that insubstantial quality contribute to our understanding of God’s work on our behalf?

Our lesson takes us to different contexts in which the Spirit works behind the scenes. Each of those is worth exploring.

1. Creation: Genesis 1:2. In Genesis 2, God gets down in the mud and shapes human beings with his hands. But in Genesis 1, the description is much more mysterious, much more ethereal: “The spirit (or wind, or breath) of God was moving on the waters.” Is the result more majestic than the earthy account of Genesis 2?

2. Building the Sanctuary: Exod. 31:1-5. We are accustomed to hearing about the Spirit’s work in “inspiring” words. But in Exodus 31:1-5, the Spirit inspires craftsmen to build the sanctuary. Could this provide a ready parallel to Ellen White’s statement that in the production of Scripture, it is not the “words” that are inspired, but the “men” that were inspired? (1 SM 21). In short, whether his messengers are working with gold or with words, it was the men who were filled with the Spirit.

3. Renewing the Community: Ezek. 37:5-9. In Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones that come to life, Scripture says that the dead bones had no “breath” (or spirit, or wind.) But at the command of God the breath/spirit comes into them and they spring to life. What kind of modern application can that vision have?

4. Mystery of the New Birth: John 3:3-8. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, we was wanting a rational explanation for the spiritual life. Instead Jesus pointed him to the mysterious work of the Spirit. Why is mystery sometimes more effective than rational explanation?

5. Jesus sends the Advocate/Spirit: John 15:26. Jesus adds some substance to the work of the Spirit when he says that he will ask the Father to send the “Advocate” (*paraklete*) or Comforter, clearly a more personal reference. What do either of these two terms add to our understanding of the work of the Spirit?

Theme: Divinity of the Holy Spirit

Leading Question: In traditional language Christians speak of the first member of the Trinity (Father), second member (Son), and third member (Spirit) as if they could be put in order of importance. Why is it important to sort out the functions of each of the three?

Note: There was a time in the early Adventist experience when neither the Son nor the Spirit were accorded full divine status. LeRoy Froom reports that in the 1890s, R. A. Underwood gave several campmeeting presentations on the topic of the Holy Spirit as “A Person of the Godhead.” “But the ministers by vote asked him not to speak further on the subject.” – LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (RH, 1971), 266. Do we know or can we imagine why there is resistance to seeing the Spirit as fully God?

Several passages in Scripture suggest that God and Spirit can be used in close proximity to each other, indeed, as virtually interchangeable as far as Divine status is concerned:

David: 2 Sam. 23:2, 3. In “David’s Last Words” (2 Sam. 23), David declares the “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue” (23:2), but follows immediately with a parallel line in 23:3: “The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me.” That parallelism suggests that Spirit and God could be used interchangeably.

Peter: Acts 5:1-4. In confronting Ananias and Sapphira about their lies, Peter declared to Ananias, “How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?” (vs. 3). Then in verse 4 Peter continues: “You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” Clearly Peter uses Spirit and God as interchangeable references.

Paul: Rom. 8:26, 27. This passage is sufficiently tantalizing that we should look at both verses carefully:

Romans 8:26, 27: In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (NASB)

Some might be tempted to see a tension between the role of the Spirit on our behalf and his role in the divine realm where he intercedes for us, as if the Father needed some convincing. But the passage can be seen as one that simply encourages the saints, reminding them that with the Spirit we are in good hands because the Father knows what the mind of the Spirit is.

Paul: 1 Cor. 12:11, 28. In 1 Cor. 12, Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit in verse 11, but then in verse 28 says that it is God who gives the gifts. Thus he uses the words interchangeably.

In the early Christian church it took several centuries before the doctrine of the Trinity could be described in terms that the main body of believers could accept it. How crucial is it that today we affirm those hard-fought battles? Early Adventists who scoffed at the idea of a creedal faith, also scoffed at the idea of the Trinity. In 1852, James White went into print with the phrase, “that old trinitarian absurdity.” Yet in an 1876 article in the *Review and Herald* in which he was arguing that the Seventh Day Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists should not intrude on each other’s work because they were so very similar, he stated: “The S.D. Adventists hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the trinitarian, that we apprehend no trial here” (*The Review and Herald*, October 12, 1876).

The textual history of the so-called Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8) indicates how tempting it was for believers to make the biblical passage more explicitly trinitarian. The difference can be seen in the King James Version when compared with the New Revised Standard Version. The words in the KJV which reflects the late edition are here placed in italics:

1 John 5:7, 8: For there are three that bear record [*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.* 8 *And there are three that bear witness in earth,*] the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. (KJV)

1 John 5:7, 8: There are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. (NRSV)

Question: What gain is there in pressing the issue of the personality of the Holy Spirit? Is there a perceived threat from mysticism if the church does not maintain the belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit?

From the standard Sabbath School lesson guide, this quotation from Ellen White concludes this lesson on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit:

It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, “the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.” It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, “He shall not speak of Himself.” John 15:26; 16:13. [51/52]

The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.” – *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911), 51, 52

Theme: The Personality of the Holy Spirit

Leading Question: Is the personality of the Holy Spirit as important to the believer as the divinity of the Spirit?

Note: Last week the emphasis was on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The practical result of such an emphasis could be to increase the distance between a holy God and sinful humanity. This week the emphasis is on the personality of the Holy Spirit. Does contemplating an impersonal force contribute to greater peace of mind than contemplating a personal being? Does it make any difference whether one stands back from God in fear, or is drawn to him in affection and love?

In his *Letters to Malcolm*, C. S. Lewis engages in a conversation with, Malcolm, a sophisticated British conversation partner, about the relationship of a person to a God of majesty and power. This is Lewis' comment about the "advantage" of seeing God as a person, even if one views God with terror:

I fully grant you that "wrath" can be attributed to God only by an analogy. The situation of the penitent before God isn't, but is somehow like, that of one appearing before a justly angered sovereign, lover, father, master, or teacher. But what more can we know about it than just this likeness? Trying to get in behind the analogy, you go further and fare worse. You suggest that what is traditionally regarded as our experience of God's anger would be more helpfully regarded as what inevitably happens to us if we behave inappropriately towards a reality of immense power. As you say, "the live wire doesn't feel angry with us, but if we blunder against it we get a shock."

My dear Malcolm, what do you suppose you have gained by substituting the image of a live wire for that of angered majesty? You have shut us all up in despair; for the angry can forgive, and electricity can't. – *Letters to Malcolm* (1963), 96

On the positive side of the ledger, Ellen White comments on the value of seeing God in personal terms. Though she does not mention the Spirit explicitly, the same point would apply as we consider the personality of the Spirit:

It was the Maker of all things who ordained the wonderful adaptation of means to end, of supply to need. It was He who in the material world provided that every desire implanted should be met. It was He who created the human soul, with its capacity for knowing and for loving. And He is not in Himself such as to leave the demands of the soul unsatisfied. No intangible principle, no impersonal essence or mere abstraction, can satisfy the needs and longings of human beings in this life of struggle with sin and sorrow and pain. It is not enough to believe in law and force, in things that have no pity, and never hear the cry for help. We need to know of an almighty arm that will hold us up, of

an infinite Friend that pities us. We need to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. And even so God has in His word revealed Himself. – *Education*, 133

Jesus and the Spirit in John 14-17. In this crucial passage in the Gospel of John, the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit is both simple and complex. If one considers those factors which point to the personality of the Spirit, several emerge. Note the ones that are evident in John 16:13, 14:

John 16:13, 14: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (NRSV)

Among other things, the Spirit guides, speaks, hears, and glorifies. All of those functions point toward a personal manifestation, not an impersonal one.

The Advocate in John 14-17. When Jesus speaks of the Advocate, he not only suggests a personal being, but also links the Father, Son, and Spirit together. John 15:26, 27 is a key passage:

John 15:26, 27: When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. (NRSV)

The Witness of the Spirit in Romans 8:14-16. In Romans 8, the Spirit plays a large role, and in several verses, the personal role of the Spirit is prominent:

Romans 8:14-16: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (NRSV).

In Sum: In terms of a believer’s view of God, what is likely to be the result if one rejects both the divinity and the personality of the Spirit. One or the other? Are they likely to stand together or fall together? Which is most vulnerable in our modern world?

Theme: The Baptism and Filling of the Holy Spirit

Leading Question: Does the New Testament give us a prescribed order of events for receiving the Holy Spirit?

Note: In the New Testament, obedience is often listed as a pre-condition for being filled with the Spirit – but not consistently. There doesn't seem to be a "regular" order of events. In theory, the sequence should be: obedience, water baptism, spirit baptism. But exceptions are plentiful.

1. At Jesus baptism: Mark 1. At Jesus' baptism, the outpouring of the Spirit seems to have been put on hold. For Jesus' himself the Spirit bore witness to the baptism, but there is no record of a charismatic outpouring of the Spirit.

2. At Pentecost: Acts 2:4, 38. The disciples themselves seemed to have received the Spirit without any record of water baptism. But in the outreach that followed, Peter linked repentance with baptism, to be followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, described in vs. 38 as the "gift" of the Holy Spirit.

3. Peter before the Jewish magistrates: Acts 5:32. Though Peter's list of events is only partial, he does call for repentance and forgiveness, The Holy Spirit is named as a witness and is promised to those who obey God.

4. Peter at Cornelius' home: Acts 10:44-48. The sequence of events is different at Cornelius' home. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (which resulted in the speaking of tongues) led Peter to the decision to baptize the Gentile believers. Obedience is not mentioned, but is no doubt assumed.

5. Peter before church leaders: Acts 11:15-17. In his report to the Christian leaders after the Cornelius event, Peter does not mention water baptism, but he does mention the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a mark of acceptance.

Question: In the New testament, does the baptism and filling of the Spirit appear as goals in and of themselves or are they simply markers for a life of obedience?

Theme: The Holy Spirit and Living a Holy Life

Leading Question: What does holiness look like?

A person's face is generally a helpful guide to the forces that are shaping that person's life. Happiness, joy, anger, cynicism, and honesty. But then there is the focus of this lesson: holiness. Since the Holy Spirit does not have a face, we have to pick up the pieces from the other members of the godhead. That would be easiest from Jesus since we have many stories about Jesus. Especially when we see him dealing with children do we get a positive perspective. Even when Jesus cleansed the temple in anger, the evil people fled in terror, but the children came running (Matt. 21:12-17). I would give anything if I could be angry like that. . . .

To set the tone for our discussion, we will look at two biblical passages, and two citations from contemporary literature.

1. Holiness: a joyful perspective. Does this passage from Ecclesiastes sound like the life of a holy person?

Ecclesiastes: 3:11-13 (NLT): Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. 12 So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. 13 And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

2. Holiness: a somber perspective. Would this passage from 1 Peter be seen as a more typical model for the devout Christian?

1 Peter 1:13-16 (NIV) Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

The New Living Translations softens the first line with: "So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. . ." The idea of soberness comes from the use of the word in a secular setting where it does refer specifically to the non-use of alcoholic beverages. The transfer to non-literal settings carries over some of that austere, self-denial flavor.

Popular perspectives. Two quotes below illustrate quite different perspectives on holiness, one from a believer, C. S. Lewis, and one from a secular novelist, Nick Hornby. The paragraph below is lifted from an advertising blurb for Hornby's book, *How to Be Good*, in the newsletter of the

Quality Paperback Book Club in 2002. It speaks of the conversion of Katie Carr's husband:

“The problem is her husband, David, a bitter under-employed intellectual who writes a column for the local newspaper under the heading ‘The Angriest Man in Holloway.’ Just as she is about to dump him, he turns, almost literally, into a saint: after receiving instruction from a faith healer named DJ GoodNews, David gives money away, works with the homeless, and even invites GoodNews to move in with them. He also becomes utterly humorless.”

By contrast, here is C. S. Lewis's perspective from *Mere Christianity*. Contrast the last line from the QPB quote with the last line from Lewis:

“Already the new [people] men are dotted here and there all over the earth. Some, as I have admitted, are still hardly recognizable: but others can be recognized. Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off. They are, I say, recognizable; but you must know what to look for. They will not be very like the idea of ‘religious people’ which you have formed from your general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think that you are being kind to them when they are really being kind to you. They love you more than other [people] men do, but they need you less (We must get over wanting to be needed [188]: in some goodish people, specially women, that is the hardest of all temptations to resist.) They will usually seem to have a lot of time: you will wonder where it comes from. When you have recognized one of them, you will recognize the next one much more easily. And I strongly suspect (but how should I know?) that they recognize one another immediately and infallibly, across every barrier of color, sex, class, age, and even of creeds. In that way, to become holy is rather like joining a secret society. To put it at the very lowest, it must be great fun.” – C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: “Beyond Personality” IV.11.10 [pp. 187-88 in MacMillan Edition]

Ellen White: A transformation. Illustrative of the striking contrast from a humorless perspective to a buoyant one, are these quotations from Ellen White as she tells the story of John the Baptist at different points in her life:

1858 *Spiritual Gifts* 1:29: “John’s life was without pleasure. It was sorrowful and self-denying....”

1897 *Youth's Instructor*, 7 Jan. 1897: “John enjoyed his life of simplicity and retirement.”

When I shared these quotes with a class for the first time, one of the students blurted out: “You mean the more Ellen White enjoyed her walk with the Lord, the more John the Baptist enjoyed his!”

Question: How does the Spirit guide us and help us to find the right perspective for the right time?

Lest we think that all of us must have a cookie cutter experience, this quotation from Ellen White emphasizes how different we can be, and laudably so. The quote is from the first paragraph of the chapter, “In Contact with Others” in *Ministry of Healing*:

Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light are to another most difficult and perplexing. – MH 483

Theme: The Holy Spirit and the Fruit of the Spirit

Leading Question: Does the Holy Spirit sometimes point us away from the gentler traits to the sterner ones?

The only New Testament passage that actually admonishes believers to be angry is this one from Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:25-27 (NRSV): So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil.

One could perhaps describe this kind of anger as the “anger of communication.” It finds an echo in the words of William Blake (via C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, pp. 96-97

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

But beyond this “anger of communication,” the New Testament rather consistently points the believer away from anger. Patience is on all of the New Testament virtue lists; anger is on none of them. Indeed, note how the “negative” works of the flesh contrast with the fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Notice how many of the “works of the flesh” are the unhappy traits: “enmities, strife, jealousy, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy.” These are not the gross sins, but are the sins of every day life. The spirit wants to point us away from such traits.

The Lesson of the Vine: John 15:1-11. In the famous parable of the vine, note how the easy it is for the inspired writer to speak of “being in Christ” but also of having “Christ in us.” Some of

the same mysterious shifting is found when the work of the Spirit is described. The Spirit can be in us: “He lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). The reverse can also be true: we can be “in the spirit” (cf. Rev. 1:10).

Summary: The positive virtues represented by the fruit of the spirit are more definitive of holy living than words like “holiness” or “righteousness” would suggest. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness” describe the kind of beings that belong in God’s kingdom, and do so in ways that the more abstract nouns cannot. And the Holy Spirit is given the task of seeing that this fruit becomes the core of human existence.

Theme: Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit

Leading Question: Is there a clear distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit?

The official study guide makes the point that the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit are not the same. And one could say that generally speaking, the gifts are tasks, enabled by the Spirit while the fruit of the Spirit represents qualities manifest in the human experience. We can discuss this lesson under three headings: Gifts, fruit, and miraculous manifestations.

Gifts: A composite list.

Romans 12:6-8: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10: message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different tongues, interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, helping, guidance, tongues.

1 Corinthians 13: faith, hope, love: love is the greatest (13:13).

1 Corinthians 14: prophesy and tongues; prophecy preferred, but tongues not excluded: “Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (14:39).

Ephesians 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

Note: There appears to be some overlap between gifts and fruit, especially in the case of love. At the end of 1 Cor. 12 with its listing of gifts, the transition to chapter 13 suggests that faith, hope and love are also gifts and the greatest is love (13:13).

Similarly, some of the gifts listed in Romans 12 almost shade into the realm of fruit: serving, encouraging and showing mercy; helping and guidance in 1 Cor. 12:28 are similarly on the borderline between gifts and fruit.

Finally, some of the gifts are more clearly in the realm of the miraculous: healing, miraculous powers, speaking in different tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10); miracles, healing, tongues (1 Cor. 12:28); tongues (1 Cor. 14).

The gift of prophecy is in the cracks. If one follows an Old Testament model, the gift of prophecy shades more into the miraculous; in the New Testament, it seems almost to be the

equivalent of the gift of teaching. The gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians seems to be closer to a charismatic manifestation; in Acts 2 it is could described as the gift of ears: each person heard in their native language. Christian communities that are more rationalistic by nature are inclined to downplay the more charismatic gifts, even denying them altogether.

Fruit. Since this lesson is on the gifts and the previous one was on fruit, this can be a short comment. In general, we could say that those with the gifts should manifest the fruit of the Spirit. But it is possible that those with the gifts fall short of fulfilling the fruit in every respect, a pastor, evangelist, or teacher with rough edges, for example.

Miraculous manifestations. As noted above, several of the gifts include the miraculous element: 1 Cor. 12:9 mentions “gifts of healing” and 12:10 lists “miraculous powers” and “speaking in different kinds of tongues; 1 Cor. 12:28 lists “miracles,” “gifts of healing,” and “different kinds of tongues.” The gift of tongues of 1 Corinthians 14, though apparently not the same as the gift of foreign tongues, still seems to shade more into the supernatural realm.

Question: With all of these gifts, how can one be certain that they are gifts of God, gifts of the good “Spirit,” and not of the other realm? After all, 1 John 4:1 admonishes us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

Theme: The Holy Spirit and the Church

Leading Question: How can we know if the Holy Spirit is at work in the church?

This week's lesson covers a cluster of items which are important to the individual believer and to the community. The Spirit is said to be important to each item, though it is not possible to actually discern the action of the Spirit. In other words, there are no "bells and whistles." The believer simply believes that the Spirit is guiding.

Union with Christ. Paul declares that it is through Christ that the Spirit unites us, yet it is the Spirit that is the agent:

Ephesians 2:18-22 (NIV) 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Baptism. Contributing to the unity of the body is the practice of baptism. Note how Paul ties baptism to the unity of the body:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NIV): 12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Scripture. Acts 17:11 indicates that the study of the Word of God was crucial for the believers whenever they heard the apostles preach: They "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (NIV). Again, the believer simply believes that the Spirit is present; there is no visible proof – except the resultant unity of the body of Christ.

Question: If the church appears to be united, is that evidence that it is being guided by the Spirit of God?

Faith and Doctrine. Again Paul declares that it is the Spirit who effectively unites the church in faith and doctrine. Ephesians 4:3-6 is a key passage:

Ephesians 4:3-6 (NIV): 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Mission and Service. Acts 2 indicates that the Spirit played a key role in equipping the early believers to reach out in mission and service. The gift of tongues (or ears!) played a key role.

Theme: The Holy Spirit, the Word, and Prayer

Leading Question: What kind of prayers would you publish if you were God?

The emphasis in the official study guide for this week is praying the right kinds of prayers. There is evidence in Scripture, however, that almost any kind of prayer will pass muster if we are serious in our efforts to get through to God. And here we have the promise of the Holy Spirit to help “translate” our prayers, so to speak, so that we can know that we will really be heard:

Romans 8:26-27 (NRSV): 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The prayer of the struggling saint is much more prominent in the Old Testament than in the new, though there are some choice New Testament prayers we should not overlook:

Desperate father: Mark 9:24. “Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’” (NRSV)

Godforsaken Jesus: Mark 15:34. “At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (NRSV)

Exasperated Moses: Numbers 11:10-15: 10 “The Israelites stood around their tents complaining. Moses heard them and was upset that they had made the Lord angry. 11 He prayed: ‘I am your servant, Lord, so why are you doing this to me? What have I done to deserve this? You’ve made me responsible for all these people, 12 but they’re not my children. You told me to nurse them along and to carry them to the land you promised their ancestors. 13 They keep whining for meat, but where can I get meat for them? 14 This job is too much for me. How can I take care of all these people by myself? 15 If this is the way you’re going to treat me, just kill me now and end my miserable life!’” (CEV)

Depressed Psalmist: Ps. 88:13-18: “Each morning I pray to you, Lord. 14 Why do you reject me? Why do you turn from me? 15 Ever since I was a child, I have been sick and close to death. You have terrified me and made me helpless. 16 Your anger is like a flood! And I am shattered by your furious attacks 17 that strike each day and from every side. 18 My friends and neighbors have turned against me because of you, and now darkness is my only companion.” (CEV)

Vengeful Psalmist: Ps. 137:7-9: 7 “Our Lord, punish the Edomites! Because the day Jerusalem

fell, they shouted, ‘Completely destroy the city! Tear down every building!’ 8 Babylon, you are doomed! I pray the Lord’s blessings on anyone who punishes you for what you did to us. 9 May the Lord bless everyone who beats your children against the rocks!’” (CEV)

Vengeful Jeremiah: Jer. 18:19-23: 19 “Please, Lord, answer my prayer. Make my enemies stop accusing me of evil. 20 I tried to help them, but they are paying me back by digging a pit to trap me. I even begged you not to punish them. 21 But now I am asking you to let their children starve or be killed in war. Let women lose their husbands and sons to disease and violence. 22 These people have dug pits and set traps for me, Lord. Make them scream in fear when you send enemy troops to attack their homes. 23 You know they plan to kill me. So get angry and punish them! Don’t ever forgive their terrible crimes.” (CEV)

Romans 8:26-27 assures us that the Spirit can translate those prayers so that they will be acceptable in the presence of God. The great truth here is that if our emotions are beyond our control, that is the time to turn to God. In the words of Ellen White, “the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest” (DA 529). Scripture assures us that the one place we can take our anger, our complaints, our sorrow, is to the great God of the universe.

C. S. Lewis has suggested that what seem to us to be our worst prayers, may, in fact, be the best in God’s eyes:

I have a notion that what seem our worst prayers may really be, in God’s eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least supported by devotional feeling and contend with the greatest disinclination. For these, perhaps, being nearly all will, come from a deeper level than feeling. In feeling there is so much that is really not ours – so much that comes from weather and health or from the last book read. One thing seems certain. It is no good angling for the rich moments. God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when He catches us, as it were, off our guard. Our preparations to receive Him sometimes have the opposite effect. – C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 116-117

Final question: What role does the Holy Spirit play in those prayers that fall short of the ideal?

Theme: Grieving and Resisting the Spirit

Leading Question: Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit worse than any other sin?

A number of New Testament passages warn against offending or sinning against the Holy Spirit. The most dire-sounding are those (from the Gospels) that warn against committing “blasphemy” against the Holy Spirit: Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:10; Matthew 12:31. The Contemporary English Version, because it avoids stain-glassed words, does not use the word “blasphemy,” but still ends up with strong words:

Mark 3:28-29: 28 I promise you that any of the sinful things you say or do can be forgiven, no matter how terrible those things are. 29 But if you speak against the Holy Spirit, you can never be forgiven. That sin will be held against you forever. (CEV)

Question: Are these strong words the equivalent of Paul’s “stick”? “What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21, NRSV). Given all the passages that assure the sinner of God’s eagerness to forgive, can these dire warnings be seen as “emergency” overkill intended to jar some hard-hearted souls back to spiritual reality?

In addition to the strong “blasphemy” passage, let’s review the various words the New Testament uses to formulate this “warning”:

Grieve (Eph. 4:30-32, NIV): 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Resist (Acts 7:51, NIV – Steven to those about to stone him): 51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

Quench (1 Thess. 5:16 -24, NIV): 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Note: The Acts 7 passage (stoning of Steven), comes closest to an act of open rebellion; The Ephesians 4 passage surveys a broad range of traits that define the Christian way positively against the backdrop of negative traits; the 1 Thessalonians 5 passage comes close to the same focus as the one in Ephesians, but is linked closely with the warning not to treat prophecies in contempt. Is that a warning against denying the supernatural?

In short, since none of these seem to be unforgiveable sins – even Steven’s strong words are words of appeal – would we be justified to turning our attention to the explicit and implicit offer of grace and forgiveness to those who turn to God?

Two of the best-known NT passages seem to offer forgiveness freely: John 3:16 – “whosoever believes” – and 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (KJV).

Two of Jesus’ most unusual parables focus on the importance of persistent prayer as the means for restoring one’s relationship with God, the parables of the midnight friend and the unjust judge:

Midnight friend (Luke 11:5-8, NIV): Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ 7 And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Unjust judge (Luke 18:1-5, NIV): 1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

In his dialogue with the sophisticated British conversation partner, C. S. Lewis relates this narrative about forgiveness, a tonic for those who have feared committing the unpardonable sin:

I really must digress to tell you a bit of good news. Last week, while at prayer, I suddenly discovered – or felt as if I did – that I had really forgiven someone I have been trying to forgive for over thirty years. Trying, and praying that I might. When the thing actually happened – sudden as the longed-for cessation of one’s neighbour’s radio – my feeling was “But it’s so easy. Why didn’t you do it ages ago?” So many things are done easily the moment you can do them at all. But till then, sheerly impossible, like learning to swim.

There are months during which no efforts will keep you up; then comes the day and hour and minute after which, and ever after, it becomes almost impossible to sink. It also seemed to me that forgiving (that man's cruelty) and being [106/107] forgiven (my resentment) were the very same thing. "Forgive and you shall be forgiven" sounds like a bargain. But perhaps it is something much more. By heavenly standards, that is, for pure intelligence, it is perhaps a tautology – forgiving and being forgiven are two names for the same thing. The important thing is that a discord has been resolved, and it is certainly the great Resolver who has done it. Finally, and perhaps best of all, I believed anew what is taught us in the parable of the Unjust Judge. No evil habit is so ingrained nor so long prayed against (as it seemed) in vain, that it cannot, even in dry old age, be whisked away.
– C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, XX.1 (pp. 106-107)

To sum up, the unpardonable sin is simply the sin of failing to come to God for forgiveness. It will not be forgiven because it was not requested. It is possible for us to grieve, resist, and even quench the Spirit. But God through the Spirit is seeking every possible way to nudge us into his kingdom.

Theme: The Work of the Holy Spirit

Leading Question: What is the most important work of the Spirit?

In John 14-17, the promise that God would send the *paraclete* (Comforter, Advocate) looms large on the horizon. The fact that Jesus describes the Advocate as his personal representative could qualify that role as being the most important work of the Spirit. And that Advocate is said to accomplish three things:

John 16:7 (NIV): 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Each of the three items deserve special attention:

1. Sin. In his Daily Study Bible volume on John, William Barclay argues that what Jesus is referring to is the fact that those who killed Jesus thought they were doing God a service. It was only after the resurrection and as a result of the work of the Spirit in the Pentecost experience that they became convicted of sin – “cut to the heart,” to quote the NIV of Acts 2:37. It is still the work of the Spirit to convict humans of sin.

2. Righteousness. Why would the truth about righteousness be linked with the fact that Jesus would be going to the Father and would no longer be visible? Jesus’ presence with the Father would leave the work of conviction of righteousness to the Spirit. And it was an astonishing development that a condemned Jewish criminal would be the source of saving righteousness.

3. Judgment. The judgment here is first the judgment of Satan. Luke 10:18 quotes the words of Jesus when the 72 came back from their mission trip during which they had accomplished miraculous things: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” This would link up with the war in heaven as described in Revelation 12:7-12 where Satan is cast out from heaven in a final sense at the cross (vs. 10). And how does the judgment relate to the believer? Zechariah 3:1-6, Satan stands as the accuser of Joshua the high priest. But the Lord rebuked him – and clothed him with fine garments, representing a righteousness which is granted him but is not his own.

The Holy Spirit and Hope. Both Romans 8 and 2 Cor. 5 point out the work of the Spirit in assuring believers of the hope of salvation and eternal life:

Romans 8:22-27 (NRSV): 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

2 Cor. 5:1-5 (NRSV): 1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— 3 if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

In sum, Scripture presents the Spirit as the one responsible for virtually all divine-human contact. The Spirit is presented as a personal being, capable of being everywhere present, a concept that we cannot fathom, given our human limitations. But as the representative of our Lord Jesus Christ, he reminds us that God will grant us all that we need.