THE HOLY SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT

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INTRODUCTION

The subject for this study is how the Holy Spirit bears witness with the Christian’s spirit. Our text, Romans 8:16, states: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” In this verse, the American Standard Version (1901) properly translates the Greek pronoun autos to “himself,” not “itself,” as in the KJV. We need to understand that the Holy Spirit is a Person; therefore, the verse should read: “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God” (emphasis added). While Romans 8:16 makes the point that the Holy Spirit bears witness with the Christian’s spirit, it does not state how He does so.

SPECIAL WITNESS GIVEN THE APOSTLES

No one can successfully deny that the Holy Spirit bore witness to Christ’s apostles. Jesus was specifically speaking to His apostles when He said: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (Jn. 16:13). No doubt, the writer of Hebrews had the apostles in mind when he said:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.
For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation;
which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:1-4, emphasis added; cf. Acts 15:8; Rom. 1:9).

It was necessary for the Holy Spirit to work with the apostles via a “direct operation” because they were the ones initially charged with carrying out the “Great Commission” (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Remember, the apostles did not have a written New Testament. Thus, the Holy Spirit operated directly in guiding the apostles into all the truth so they could teach “all things” as the Lord had instructed them. Furthermore, He bore them witness by empowering each of them with “the signs of an apostle,” which included “signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). Certainly, the Holy Spirit does not “operate directly” in bearing witness to men today as He did to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

BEARING WITNESS EXPLAINED

Upon hearing the word “witness,” people usually think of one who testifies or gives evidence in a civil or criminal judicial matter. A good and proper “witness” provides adequate and accurate evidence which helps to establish the facts necessary to prove or disprove a matter. Regarding the Holy Spirit, it must be understood that as a witness He is objective, not subjective. Furthermore, because He is omniscient, His witness is sure, true, factual, and substantive. To be sure, the Holy Spirit has provided ample credible evidence to prove that which God would have man to know (cf. 1Cor. 2:9-16). Resting his faith upon the evidence provided by the Holy Spirit, a man can be certain of his standing before God.

BEARING WITNESS IS CRUCIAL TO OUR FAITH

Writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the penman of Hebrews stated: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). This testimony comes from Holy Spirit and it bears witness to the fact that the Christian can confidently “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). The testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is the Word of God, has been confirmed (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4). Since “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), and since the Holy Spirit is the One Who guided men to speak and write the Word of God (Lk. 12:11-12; Jn.
16:13; Acts 2:4; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), then it is safe to conclude that a man’s God-approved faith is based upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

CONFUSION EXISTS ABOUT BEARING WITNESS

Two millennia ago, Christ’s apostles were witnesses to Him and to His teaching (Acts 1:8; 2:32; 5:32; cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-3). Today, many religious people claim they are witnesses, “witnessing for Christ.” If men living in recent times think they are “testifying” and “witnessing for Christ,” doing the same thing that was done by the apostles and some other first century Christians, they are wrong. Those in the Bible which the Holy Spirit certified to be “witnesses” had truly witnessed “firsthand” either the Lord’s death, burial, or resurrection—some witnessed all three of those happenings. No one now living is or can be the same kind of witness as those identified as such by the Holy Spirit. Now, Scripture stands as the written record of the witnesses’ true testimony. Thus, through inspiration of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit bears His witness. His witness is all that is needed for because it testifies, giving all the facts about salvation and judgment that man needs to know (cf. Jn. 12:48-50; 14:6; Mt. 24:35; Heb. 6:17-20).

JUDGEMENT IS BASED UPON THE WITNESS

Jesus said: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48). Christ’s word will judge us in the last day. His word is the Word of God (v. 49), and it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same will. Likewise, they have the same testimony. That testimony comes to us through the witness of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13). In His testimony, the Holy Spirit has revealed “all truth,” i.e., that by which we will be judged in the last day.

Because of the Holy Spirit’s testimony as a witness, man has no need to fear Judgment Day because he can prepare for it. Peter said we have been given “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). He went on to say that if we will add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity we can make our salvation sure (vv. 5-8). By doing those things, we are preparing ourselves for the Judgment and an entrance into Heaven. Giving us blessed assurance about this through Peter, the Holy Spirit testifies: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:
For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

How is it that we can connect the Holy Spirit’s testimony with our being made ready for the Judgment? Because, in the same context of 2 Peter 1:5-11, Peter made that connection when he said:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Notice, the holy men of God “were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Their words were neither spurious nor vague. Also, take note of the comparison and contrast Peter makes between those “holy men of God” who were “moved by the Holy Ghost,” and those “false prophet” and “false teacher” who brought in “damnable heresies” (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1ff; 3:1-8). What the “holy men of God” spoke and wrote was absolute truth because the “Spirit of truth,” i.e., Holy Spirit, had guided them in what they said. Speaking of “a more sure word of prophecy,” in light of John 14:26 and 16:13, we know that the witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit enables us to know that we are the children of God (Jn. 20:30-31; 1 Jn. 2:3). Again, our destiny in the eternal judgment will be based upon the witness and testimony presented by the Holy Spirit, as revealed in God’s Word.

**ALL SCRIPTURE INSPIRED OF GOD IS OUR WITNESS, AND IT IS ALL SUFICIENT**

Paul wrote: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As a witness, the Bible testifies that we have been given every thing that pertains unto life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, since the Holy Spirit has born this witness through the Word of God, and because we can read and study that Word (2 Tim. 2:15), we can know His commandments and keep them in order to be saved (1 Jn. 2:3-5). In fact, one of the major points made in 1 John is to let Christians know that if they continue to
“walk in the light” the blood of Christ will continue to cleanse them. That, too, is testimony given by the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT’S WITNESS IN THE BIBLE

Romans 8:16 expressly affirms: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” As is the case with any verse in the Bible, this one must be considered in light of its overall context.

Paul set the tone for his epistle to Rome when he declared:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

Accordingly, neither the Jews’ Law of Moses nor the Gentiles’ Law of Patriarchy, but only the Gospel of Christ, which is the law of faith, is God’s power to save (cf. 3:27-29). Few receive and obey the Gospel and most reject it, but that does not change the fact that the Gospel “is the power of God unto salvation.”

The Gospel, and the Christian system it contains, was revealed by the Holy Spirit. That is the way Romans 8:16 should be viewed, i.e., through His testimony in the Gospel, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly believe and claim that the Holy Spirit in some direct way—separate and apart from His witness or testimony in Scripture—bears witness unto them.

WITNESS IS OBJECTIVE, NOT SUBJECTIVE OR RELATIVE

Paul told the Romans: “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Rom. 1:15). Later, he said: “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25). So, “the gospel” had formerly been “the mystery ... kept secret since the world began.” Now it was being revealed to Christ’s apostles and to certain other holy men of God by the Holy Spirit.

The “mystery,” that had been kept secret, Paul says, “now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). Not only did Paul reveal that
mystery in his preaching, he did so in his writing. To the Ephesians, he wrote:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:1-5).

Paul had received the very Word of God by “revelation” from the Holy Spirit, and on this matter he was willing to be put to the test. He emphatically stated: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).

John, another of Christ’s apostles, was guided by the Holy Spirit to write God’s Word. In so doing, the Holy Spirit made it known that His witness given in the written word is sufficient to save a lost sinner’s soul. Through John, the Holy Spirit testified:

“[M]any other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jn. 20:30-31, emphasis added). It is by the means of written testimony, i.e., the Bible, alone that the Holy Spirit bears witness today. He never does so separate and/or apart from it.

CALVINISM’S ERROR REGARDING THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Yes, the “Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16); however, He does not do so in the way the Calvinists believe and teach that He does. This is an area where Calvinism gets people into serious trouble. Calvinism holds that the Holy Spirit operates directly, i.e., “Spirit on spirit,” separate and apart from the Word of God, and that He does so on sinner and saint alike. The Bible teaches no such thing. In no way does the Holy Spirit bear witness with any man’s spirit separate and apart from His Word, the Bible. Today, the Holy Spirit’s witness is found only in the Bible. For a man’s spirit to benefit from the witness of the Holy Spirit, a man must take the Holy Spirit’s testimony (found only in Scripture) consider it,
analyze it, and receive it with meekness, for it alone is able to purify his soul (cf. Acts 2:41; 17:11; Jas. 1:18-21; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

When a person reads, studies, and meditates upon God’s Word, then receives the witness of the Holy Spirit contained therein, faith is produced in that person’s heart (Rom. 10:17). Acting upon that faith, he can become a child of God (Jn. 1:12), one who is justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). Contrary to Calvinism, one must never think that “faith alone” or “faith without works” will justify him (cf. Rom. 6:17-18; Jas. 2:14-26). The witness of the Holy Spirit bears no such testimony to any man.

**CONCLUSION**

Simply stated, when men obey the Gospel, the Holy Spirit bears witness with their spirits that they are saved. By complying with the testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding what one must do in order to be saved, they are “born again ... born of water and of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:3-5), and they become the “children of God” (Gal. 3:26-27). Thus, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:16-17). That is encouraging!

**ENDNOTES**

1 All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.