

Prayer List

Gene
Veda
Wallace
Sheila
Judy

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 10:00 a.m.
Assembly 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

This Week's Question:

Who did God promise would be buried at a ripe old age?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Hezekiah - Isaiah 38:18

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The Spirit's "Testimony"

Mike Wilson

The foregoing title represents a line of thought in the New Testament which is totally misused by advocates of a direct, subjective encounter with the Spirit. R. C. Sproul, a popular evangelical writer, in a chapter entitled "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," admits that the Spirit's testimony "is not an isolated work of the Spirit ripped loose from the written Word" (Inerrancy, Ed. Norman Geisler, Zondervan, 1980, p. 354). However, he struggles assiduously in the same article to create and clarify that very distinction. He says the "uniqueness" of the testimonium is found in its focus on the question of certainty. The Spirit in His internal testimony works to confirm the reliability of Scripture, giving us certainty that the Bible is the word of God" (p. 338). He quotes and interprets at length John Calvin's statement, "the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason" (p. 341). Finally, he cites 1 Corinthians 2:4-11 as a "classic" example, adding, "The Spirit is not mentioned merely as being the source of the content but as being the basis of the persuasive power of the words" (p. 354).

The Bible does indeed teach an evidential testimony of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the apostolic message. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit and the apostles would be co-witnesses in the proclamation of the gospel (John 15:26–27). This promise was fully realized (Acts 5:32). The concept of a “witness,” however, implies much more than a vague “internal testimony” by the Spirit or the idea of sharing one’s faith (“witnessing”). In these scriptures it is used of firsthand testimony for verification purposes, as in a court of law (see the term in John 5:30–47). To be one of the twelve apostles, one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32). The gospel message is validated in large part because it is corroborated by a wealth of honest, firsthand testimony (see Acts 2:22, 32; 13:30–31; 26:16, 26; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1–4; John 19:35; etc.).

Nevertheless, when the apostles had established the case of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension—utilizing their own personal knowledge of what really happened—they proceeded to do something for which they could not give validating proof by their own unaided human powers. In preaching the gospel, they not only proclaimed a Risen Lord, but they also “bound” those heaven-revealed terms of pardon that provided salvation to all men (Matthew 16:18–19; 18:18). How could they prove their status, not only as eyewitnesses but as Christ’s chosen ambassadors?

The answer is that the Holy Spirit rendered testimony that would prove undeniably the truth of what they were saying. The Spirit’s testimony and the apostle’s testimony would unite in such a way as to confirm the truthfulness of the message. The witness of the Spirit would not be a hazy, better-felt-than-told “inward illumination.” Such an idea cheapens the real value of what the Spirit accomplished.

The Holy Spirit bore witness by “confirming” the apostles’ message through “signs, wonders, and

miracles” (Mark 16:15–20; 2 Corinthians 2:12). The divine power was manifested by tangible manifestations. Hebrews 2:3–4 is clear on this point: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (emph. mine, MW).

And what of Sproul’s “classic text for the testimonium,” 1 Corinthians 2? Paul did say, “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (2:4–5). Similar language is used by the apostle in 1 Thessalonians 1:5—“for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit ...” What kind of power was Paul talking about—an indefinable voice within, or empirical, objective evidence? When Paul preached the gospel, the “power of the Holy Spirit” confirming his message was the “power of signs and wonders” (Romans 15:19).

Miracle-working, then, was a necessary proof that the message transmitted by chosen men was indeed of supernatural origin. This grand “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” gives us confidence as well, as the testimony from those who saw and heard is decisive. When we study the Spirit’s message and come to terms with the irrefutable testimony contained therein, it can even be said that our faith does “not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

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