

SESSION 6. A Biblical Understanding of the Holy Spirit For Today THE Holy Spirit in the Letter of Paul

John T. Carroll, in *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, offers an overview of the experience of the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit). Carroll focuses on five of the seven letters generally considered as written by Paul that include: 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. Each letter uses the Spirit of God in thematic ways in the letters often in reference to good human relationships. Carroll suggests a deeper dive into unpacking the Spirit of God.

FIRST THESSALONIANS

We will read the scriptures and seek to walk with Paul who writes to converts from other polytheistic religious practices (idol worship). The challenge of new converts feeling the hostility of old friends and neighbors because of their faith is uncomfortable. Some among them have experienced death before the Parousia (4:13-18). This is a letter of encouragement according to Carroll.

- Chapter 1:2-6 is prayer of thanksgiving and the message of faith. What does Paul point to about the work of the Spirit?
- Chapter 4:1-12 relate an ethic of care and trust with the Holy Spirit as gift. What is the problem and how is the Holy Spirit associated with this human issue?
- Chapter 5:19 connects the Spirit with prophetic activity. What can be understood about resisting or suppressing the Holy Spirit and the sharing of good news today? Read Chapter 5: 20-21.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

- Spirit (pneuma) is well used in this letter. How many times is pneuma or Spirit to be counted in Chapter 2: 1-16 and Chapter 12: 1-13?
- How does Paul connect the activity of the Spirit with his work? 1 Corinthians 2:4.
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:18 to 2:5. What is contrasted with human wisdom and strength? Why?
- The Spirit teaches about “the deep mysteries” of the Divine (2:6-16).
- Divine revelation is made known by the Spirit – (see also 2 Corinthians 3:1-18)
- The Spirit is the teacher of spiritual gifts which are given (1Cor 2:12-14).
- The community so influenced by the Spirit of God has “the mind of Christ” (2:16). [What is this “mind of Christ?”]

- Community Building
- Paul connects the work of the Spirit with shaping community. This community shaping of the Spirit show a bond between theology and ethics. Belief and transformed practice in relationships in Christ reflects the character of God via Christ. Faith and conduct matters for Paul where the Corinthian body is “holy dwelling place of the holy God” (3:16). Holy Spirit as God’s presence is an effective agent of transformation. Read (6:11,17-19).
- Chapters 11-14 address how the presence of Holy Spirit is to guide community activity.
- Spirit Unity in diverse gifts for Paul is just a suggested working of what Spirit-people can do in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Name them in the order as presented. What is the purpose of the gifts?
- In 1 Corinthians 12:7-13, Paul lists nine gifts animated by the Spirit: (Name them).
- Paul adds other animation: his own animation – 7:34; as well as the “spirits of the prophets” in 14:32. One Spirit of God creates and organizes the unified community that embraces more than just diverse gifts, but the social/cultural changes (12:12-13).
- In relation to worship, Paul offers directions that are practical – 1 Corinthians 14. Emphasis continues on the one Spirit, orderly manner, and the usage of tongues about the mysteries of God. Further, Paul envisions in 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection as of a “spiritual body.” This is continual connection or existence under the control of the Holy Spirit with the ability for sharing in God’s life.

SECOND CORINTHIANS:

Spirit as “down payment” or first installment of the future realization of God’s unqualified promise (1:19-22). Read also, 2 Corinthians 5:5 and compare with Romans 8:23.

The Spirit plays role as life-bearer and agent of transformation. Read 3:4-18. Would you consider the Spirit as a master interpreter who guides the community in interpreting scripture?

How important is 2 Corinthians 13:13 to the local church?

GALATIANS

Read chapter 3:2-5. How is Spirit important in understanding Paul’s (and Jesus’) message to the new converts?

What is the Spirit-life for today? Read Galatians 5:22-23. Name them and compare with the qualities of Galatians 5:20-21.

ROMANS

Spirit as source and power for the moral life.

Spirit as the hope-engendering presence of God even in the reality of suffering.

Read Romans 8. Note the following:

8:2-14 [Two modes of life] What are they?

8:11 [Points to future life with resurrection]

8:13 [Doing what is right]

8:14-17 [Vision of being led by the Spirit]

8:23 [Spirit mediates and prays with believers for future]

8:28-39 [God's yes to all creation]

CONCLUSION:

The Spirit is dynamic in understanding and usage by Paul. Themes of resurrection, and its future availability are highlighted in his letters. Holy Spirit is "both guide and source of power for the moral life." Spirit mediates gifts of faith and faithfulness facilitating right relationship among humans and with the Divine. Spirit influence is for a lived life that is both personal and corporate. This contributes toward the health of community that embraces diversity and change.