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The Law of the Spirit

The Power of God's Word

¹³ And we will never stop thanking God that when we preached his message to you, you didn't think of the words we spoke as being just our own. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it was. And this word continues to work in you who believe.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Right from the beginning of the Biblical record we see the power of God's spoken word. God created the universe by His word (Genesis 1:3), and sustains it by His word (Hebrews 1:3). His word is described as a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29) and a sword (Hebrews 4:12a). It guides us when making decisions (Psalm 119:105) and helps us to stay pure (Psalm 119:9,11). God's word finds its target in man's heart (Hebrews 4:12b) and accomplishes what He intends (Isaiah 55:11). It is this word that we speak when communicating Biblical truth, knowing that God will use it to continue His work in man.

The effectiveness of God's communicated word comes through the action of the Holy Spirit - the most indispensable requirement for effective Christian communication, and the focus of this first Law.

"Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its essence, a religion of the Word of God."

- John Stott, *"Between Two Worlds"*

The Spirit's Mandate

1. The Call to Communicate

a. The need for communicators (Romans 10:14,15)

The need for faithful, skilled communicators of God's word is as great today as it ever has been. God declares a blessing for those who take up this important call.

b. Compelled by God: Paul (1 Corinthians 9:16)

The Spirit's mandate to communicate comes out of a sense of compulsion. The issue is not, "Am I able to communicate God's truth", but "Am I unable to not communicate God's truth".

c. Submission to Christ: John the Baptist (John 3:28,29,31)

The Spirit's mandate to effectively communicate God's truth, requires submission to Christ. The Christian communicator is to live a life of obedience to Him, practising what they preach. Any praise or attention they receive sits uncomfortably with them - they only want Christ to be glorified.

¹⁸ For I am pent up and full of words, and the spirit within me urges me on. ¹⁹ I am like a wine cask without a vent. My words are ready to burst out! ²⁰ I must speak to find relief, so let me give my answers.

2. The Excuses

Despite the seriousness of the mandate, and in contrast to those who communicate out of a selfish motivation, others use a range of excuses to avoid their God-given responsibility.

a. Ability: Moses (Exodus 4:10-12)

Some people find that the ability to communicate comes more naturally to them than to others. They have a certain natural ability that seems to mark them out for usefulness. Yet in this passage we are reminded that God is able to powerfully use even those who are "clumsy with words". Training in communication has its place but it can never surpass God's enabling power, through a "weak vessel" who trusts in Him.

"Sharing the message of Christ's love with the young people of our world is a challenge unequalled in its importance and urgency."

- Ken Davis, "How to Speak to Youth"

b. Age: Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-7)

A second excuse is age - a feeling that we are too young to undertake the task of communication. God reminded Jeremiah that the right to speak is not something earned by age but something conferred by God even before we were born. The experience that comes with age may make us more effective, but it is up to God to determine when we are ready - it is not for us to decide.

c. Appropriateness: Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5-8)

Still other reason for avoiding the communication of God's truth is that it seems inappropriate for us to do so. Knowing our own faults and failings, we might consider ourselves to be unworthy of such an important honour. We may feel that we must learn to be a "better Christian" before we have earned the right to speak. Yet from Isaiah's call we see that righteousness is something God bestows on us - not something we must earn.

d. Antagonism: Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3-5)

Another excuse is the belief that no one will listen to us - that they may in fact criticise us. But God was quick to point out to Ezekiel that this was not the point. The point is our obedience to God, not the anticipated response of those who listen.

e. Apathy: Jonah (Jonah 4:2,3)

Jonah ran from God because he did not want God to spare the people of Ninevah who were Israel's enemies. He showed a lack of concern for the spiritual welfare of others, which for us today is more commonly evidenced through apathy.

The Necessity of the Spirit

1. The Spirit and the Speaker

a. Reliance upon the Spirit: Paul (1 Corinthians 2:4,5)

Throughout this workbook you will learn a considerable number of skills and techniques for effective communication. However, undergirding these helpful techniques is the conviction that without the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, these skills and techniques will ultimately fail to bear lasting fruit.

b. Empowered by the Spirit: Peter (Acts 2:1-4,14)

Any communicator used by God knows that they are reliant upon the Holy Spirit, both for their ability to speak and for making a lasting impact in the lives of their hearers. This reliance is evidenced by serious commitment to prayer.

2. The Spirit and the Subject

Through the pages of Scripture, the Spirit gives us many helpful guidelines regarding content. These will be developed further throughout the workbook, but deserve mention here:

a. Communicate with correctness (2 Timothy 2:15,16)

The first responsibility of a communicator is to ensure that their content is correct and accurate. God has gone to great lengths to ensure that His Spirit-inspired Word has been accurately passed down to us. We have a responsibility not to handle it lightly or loosely.

“Homiletics may indeed be taught by books and lectures; but at the heart of everything, stands the personal equations, and the real work is done, not on the level where a man acquires a knowledge of technique and rules and devices, but on the deep levels of self commitment where he rigorously disciplines his life for the love of Jesus Christ.”

- Dr James Stewart,

“Preaching”

“The world chatters on today, but few men speak from the presence of God, with a conscious dependence upon His power.”

-Denis Lane,

“Preach the Word”

“One word of truth outweighs the whole world.”

- Alexander

Solzhenitsyn

b. Communicate with clarity (Habakkuk 2:2)

A communicator has a responsibility to ensure that their audience is able to understand the content of their communication, so that the Spirit can do His work. It should be appropriate to the age group and the experiences of those listening if it is to be relevant to their lives.

c. Communicate with courage (2 Timothy 4:3-5)

At times the Holy Spirit will ask us to communicate some hard truths to people - things that we know they do not want to hear. God's communicator has a responsibility to ensure that they do not water down their content to suit their hearers, but courageously speak the truth with an attitude of humility and grace.

d. Communicate with conviction (2 Timothy 4:2)

Spirit-inspired communication will have a ring of conviction about it. It's content will not merely be transposed from someone else's ideas but will be shaped by out of the communicator's own life experience.

e. Communicate with a challenge (Philippians 4:8,9)

Good communication of God's truth must have a point to it. We do not communicate merely to inform or entertain. Our message must answer the question, "So what?" - that is, it must assist people to hear from God and know what they must do in response to His direction.

f. Communicate Christ (2 Corinthians 4:5)

Finally, Spirit inspired content will ultimately point to Christ. While our communication will at times explicitly address needs, it will do so in such a way as to direct people toward Christ and not their own resources.

"No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."

- *Ralph Turnbull,*
"A Minister's
Obstacles"

3. The Spirit and the Student

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about His impending departure, He described the role in their life of the Holy Spirit who was to come after Him. In particular He mentioned Five actions which the Spirit would perform, all of which may become evident through effective communication.

a. To teach us

²⁶ But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.

- John 14:26

b. To guide us

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

- John 16:13

c. To convict us

⁷ But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

- John 16:7,8

d. To comfort us

¹⁵ "If you love me, obey my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter who will never leave you.

- John 14:15,16

e. To make Jesus more real to us

²⁶ "But I will send you the Counselor—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me. ²⁷ And you must also tell others about me because you have been with me from the beginning.

- John 15:26,27

Proceed to page 1 in the workbook and complete the questions

