

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT

RECOGNITION OF THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN COMMUNICATION

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

¹⁴ But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵ And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

- 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

¹⁶ For preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't do it!

- 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".

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.

- Job 32:18-20

c. Submission to Christ: John the Baptist

²⁸ You yourselves know how plainly I told you that I am not the Messiah. I am here to prepare the way for him—that is all. ³⁰ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. ³¹ "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. I am of the earth, and my understanding is limited to the things of earth, but he has come from heaven.

- 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.

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

¹⁰ *But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words."*

¹¹ *"Who makes mouths?" the LORD asked him. "Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD?"* ¹² *Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say."*

- 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.

b. Age: Jeremiah

⁴ *The LORD gave me a message. He said,* ⁵ *"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world."*

⁶ *"O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"*

⁷ *"Don't say that," the LORD replied, "for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you."*

- 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.

"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"

c. Appropriateness: Isaiah

⁵ Then I said, “My destruction is sealed, for I am a sinful man and a member of a sinful race. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew over to the altar, and he picked up a burning coal with a pair of tongs. ⁷ He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”

⁸ Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go for us?”

And I said, “Lord, I’ll go! Send me.”

- 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

³ “Son of man,” he said, “I am sending you to the nation of Israel, a nation that is rebelling against me. Their ancestors have rebelled against me from the beginning, and they are still in revolt to this very day. ⁴ They are a hard-hearted and stubborn people. But I am sending you to say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says!’ ⁵ And whether they listen or not—for remember, they are rebels—at least they will know they have had a prophet among them.”

- 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

² So he complained to the LORD about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people. ³ Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen.”

- 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.



Reflect on your ministry, and any tendency you may have to avoid aspects of communication. Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

THE EXCUSES

YES _____ NO
"I avoid God's call to communicate His word through a belief that I lack the ability to be effective."

YES _____ NO
"I avoid God's call to communicate His word through a belief that I am too young."

YES _____ NO
"I avoid God's call to communicate His word through a sense of personal unworthiness."

YES _____ NO
"I avoid God's call to communicate His word through a fear of criticism."

YES _____ NO
"I avoid God's call to communicate His word through a lack of real concern for others."

The areas I most want to work on are:

- 1.
- 2.

The Necessity of the Spirit

1. The Spirit and the Speaker

a. Reliance upon the Spirit: Paul

⁴ And my message and my preaching were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches, but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you. ⁵ I did this so that you might trust the power of God rather than human wisdom.

- 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

² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

¹⁴ Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this.

- 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.

"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"

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

¹⁵ Work hard so God can approve you. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. ¹⁶ Avoid godless, foolish discussions that lead to more and more ungodliness.
- 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.

"One word of truth outweighs the whole world."
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn

b. Communicate with clarity

² Then the LORD said to me, "Write my answer in large, clear letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell everyone else.
- Habbakuk 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

³ For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and follow strange myths. ⁵ But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you.
- 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 Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.
- 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

⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.
- 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

⁵ We don't go around preaching about ourselves; we preach Christ Jesus, the Lord. All we say about ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us.
- 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"



Reflect on your ministry as a communicator, and respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

THE SPIRIT AND THE SPEAKER

NO YES
"I communicate God's truth, not because I am able, but because I am unable to not communicate it.." _____

NO YES
"I communicate with a sense of reliance upon God's Spirit not upon techniques and my own skill." _____

NO YES
"I communicate with a sense of reliance upon God's Spirit, evidenced by committed prayer." _____

THE SPIRIT AND THE SUBJECT

NO YES
"I work hard to ensure that what I communicate is accurate, and in accordance with Biblical truth." _____

NO YES
"I communicate Biblical truth even if I know it will be unpopular with those who hear it." _____

NO YES
"I communicate with a conviction borne out of personal experience and not mere head knowledge." _____

NO YES
"When I communicate God's truth I do so with a challenge that encourages people to apply it." _____

NO YES
"When I communicate, I ensure that my message is one that ultimately directs people toward Christ." _____

The areas I most want to work on are:

1.

2.

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 four 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 Counselor¹, 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

¹ Or Comforter, or Encourager, or Advocate. Greek *Paraclete*.

The Spirit's Example

Through His unity with the Holy Spirit, Jesus provides us with the ultimate example of the role of the Spirit in communication.

1. Jesus: The Teacher

a. Anointed by the Spirit

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors,
¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*

- Luke 4:18,19

After his baptism and temptation, Jesus embarked on a speaking circuit of the towns of Galilee. Upon entering His home town of Nazareth, He stood in the synagogue and spoke these words. The Spirit of the Lord, which anointed Him at His baptism was indispensable element of His preaching ministry. If that was true for Jesus, how much more so it must be for us.

"Without anointing and surrender, the preachers words are devoid of penetration and thrust. With anointing His words become the Word of God."

- Donald Demaray,
"An Introduction to
Homiletics"

b. The Priority of Preaching

³⁵ *The next morning Jesus awoke long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray. ³⁶ Later Simon and the others went out to find him. ³⁷ They said, "Everyone is asking for you."
³⁸ But he replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came."*

- Mark 1:35-38

Jesus' ministry saw him performing miracles, healing the sick and casting out demons. However the main thrust of His ministry was preaching, strengthened by the resources He found through prayer. The miracles served as a sign to validate His preaching (John 3:2).

"The best way to revive the church is to build a fire in the pulpit."

- D. L. Moody

2. The Teaching of Jesus

There are many helpful lessons about communication which we can learn from Jesus.

a. The power of relationship

¹² I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. ¹³ And here is how to measure it—the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you obey me. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.
- Luke 8:1

The effectiveness of Jesus' teaching was due in no small part to the quality of relationship he developed with His hearers. Through love and friendship, he earned credibility and the right to be heard.

b. Building on previous knowledge

⁴³ "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"
- Matthew 7:43,44

We learn here an important lesson in communication from Jesus: to start where our listeners are at and build on their knowledge. He consistently challenged people's understanding of the Old Testament, so as to make them think beyond the words they were familiar with, and grapple with deeper principles.

c. Relevant Illustrations

⁴ One day Jesus told this story to a large crowd that had gathered from many towns to hear him: ⁵ "A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds came and ate it.
- Luke 8:3,4

Jesus used images to illustrate His teaching that were familiar to His hearers, such as those related to agriculture, shepherding, fishing and money.

d. Humour

³ *And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.*

- Matthew 7:3-5

Humorous images such as a log in the eye and a camel passing through the eye of a needle, not only held people's attention, but helped make Jesus' teaching memorable.

e. Hyperbole

²⁷ *"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ So if your eye—even if it is your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

- Matthew 5:27-31

Jesus at times used the communication technique of overstatement or exaggeration in order to make His point.

f. Tension

¹⁴ *"Teacher," these men said, "we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?"*

Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Whom are you trying to fool with your trick questions? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you." ¹⁶ When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

¹⁷ *"Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God." This reply completely amazed them.*

- Mark 12:13-17

Another technique commonly used by Jesus was that of creating a situation of tension and then asking His listeners to resolve the tension. In doing so, the listeners discovered truth for themselves.

g. Life related lessons

⁴⁶ Then there was an argument among them as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus knew their thoughts, so he brought a little child to his side. ⁴⁸ Then he said to them, “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest.”

- Luke 9:46-48

Jesus did not reserve His teaching for a designated time slot once a week. He used situations that arose in the course of daily life on order to press home a point.

h. Practical application

¹ The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them on ahead in pairs to all the towns and villages he planned to visit. ¹⁷ When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to him, “Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!”

¹⁸ “Yes,” he told them, “I saw Satan falling from heaven as a flash of lightning! ²⁰ But don’t rejoice just because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered as citizens of heaven.”

- Luke 10:1,17,18,20

Jesus gave his disciples tasks to perform and then “debriefed” the experience with them later.



Each of these eight points will be developed in greater detail later in this workbook. For now, ask yourself which you most need to develop, and in what setting (preaching, teaching or leading)? Record some thoughts below:

For Further Thought...

Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in your teaching and preaching? In what ways do you recognise His role? What experiences have you had of His leading? What areas do you need to work on to ensure that He is able to work through you?

