

Filled with the Word and Spirit

Mark Heath, 21 Oct 2007

1. Introducing the Word and Spirit

Part of growing up is learning to eat and drink properly - we need it to be strong and healthy.

1.1 The Word is Food, the Spirit is Drink

God has given us spiritual food and drink, to help us to be strong and healthy Christians. In many places in the Bible, the Word of God (Scripture) is pictured as food to be eaten, and the Spirit of God is presented as water to refresh our thirst.

Example 1- Jesus

Matt 4:4 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"

John 7:37-39 "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Other Examples

Nehemiah prays a prayer in Neh 9 where he meditates on God's miraculous provision in the wilderness. When the people were hungry God sent manna from heaven, and when they were thirsty he gave them water from the Rock. He ties this in with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (v20) and the Word of God (the law) (v14,15)

1 Cor 12:13 – "we were all made to drink of one Spirit"

Ezekiel (Ezek 3:1) and John (Rev 10:9) are asked to eat books containing the Word of God, symbolising that it must get right inside them and become part of them

We will become spiritually malnourished and spiritually dehydrated if we do not feed regularly on the Word and keep drinking of the Spirit.

1.2. The Word and Spirit are Grace Gifts

The Christian life begins with grace and continues by grace

We are given the underserved gift of our salvation by grace, and by grace we are given the resources we need to live fruitful lives of service for God.

The Christian life begins with Word and Spirit and continues with Word and Spirit

We are saved when we hear the Word of the gospel, and the Spirit awakens our hearts to receive it and dwells within us. We go on as disciples of Jesus by continuing to learn from his Word and be filled with his Spirit.

A baby cannot consume a lifetime's worth of food and drink in one sitting. Similarly, when we are born again, we need to keep on being filled with the Word and Spirit so that we are nourished and grow spiritually.

The OT prophets foresaw a time when God would put his Spirit within his people. This would not remove the need for the Scriptures; rather it would allow people to obey them from the heart.

Ezek 36:27 "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules"

Jer 31:33 "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

The New Covenant promise was of Word and Spirit - that people would know God's Word deep within them, and that it would go from the head right to the heart, and that they would be empowered to live righteously by the indwelling of the Spirit.

Why are these gifts so important?

The purpose of the Christian life is to have the image of Christ formed in us - we are going to be like him (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). The main reason to be filled with the Word and the Spirit is that Jesus was. To become more like Jesus, we need to eat the "Jesus diet"

2. Jesus was a Man Filled with the Word and Spirit

2.1. As a young child Jesus was an eager student of the Word

We see this initially when he was just a small boy aged 12, when his parents lost him in Jerusalem: "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:46-47)

Jesus was *listening* and *asking questions*. He was eager to learn about the Word

2.2. Jesus used the Word against temptation

Luke 4 records the temptation of Jesus by Satan as he fasted in the wilderness after being baptised. To each of the three temptations, Jesus responds with quotations from Scripture (v4, v8, v12).

2.3. Jesus followed the leading of the Spirit

It was the Spirit that led him into the wilderness to fast - there wasn't a Bible verse telling him to go there - he followed the Spirit's inner prompting.

Luke 4:1 "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness"

He relied on the Spirit to know God's *timing*. He knew that he was called to die, yet it was the Spirit who helped him to know when the "hour" had come (e.g. see John 7:8; 13:1; 17:1)

2.4. Jesus understood who we was from the Word

Jesus saw and understood that he was the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (e.g. Matt 5:17; Luke 22:37, John 13:18) "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27) Jesus saw himself in the Scriptures - he let them form his self-understanding and identity.

We too must immerse ourselves in the Word if we are to understand the truth of who we are in Christ. The Scripture is like a light - it *exposes* us - shows us what we really are, but it also *reveals* Jesus, and shows us what we have become now we are *in Christ*.

2.5. Jesus related to the Father by the Spirit

Rom 8:15 teaches us that it is the Spirit who teaches us to call God "Abba" Father. Jesus gave us the ultimate example of how to relate closely to God as Father, loving him, spending time with him, doing what he tells us to do and saying what he tells us to say

2.6. Jesus' sense of purpose came from the Word

He didn't only know who he was, but what he was called to do. Jesus began his public ministry after his temptation, by announcing his “mission statement:

Luke 4:17-21 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

We must immerse ourselves in the Word if we are to understand our role in fulfilling the mission and purposes of God on the earth. God has purposes and plans for our lives, good works he has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)

2.7. Jesus had implicit trust in the Word

He used it as authority as he settled debates (e.g. John 10:35 “Scripture cannot be broken”; Mark 12:24-27).

Matt 5:17-18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

He critiqued religious interpretations and additions to Scripture, but never the Scriptures themselves. This is why we as evangelicals have a “high view of Scripture” – Jesus trusted the Scriptures, and so do we.

Yet Jesus placed his words as equal authority with Scripture, placing himself as their key.

Matt 24:35 “Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away”

“You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you” (Matt 5:21,22)

This is why the Christian Bible is not just the Old Testament but includes the New Testament witness to the life and teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

2.8. Jesus' was empowered to perform miracles and to suffer by the Spirit

Jesus was *fully human* and *fully divine*. Yet, he chose to live within the constraints of our human limitations – he experienced hunger, tiredness and pain in exactly the same way we do. He even had to learn to walk and talk as he grew up.

Despite sharing our humanity, he performed three “super-human” feats:

He didn't sin - we have already seen that he faced temptation filled with the Spirit

He performed miracles – Jesus did of course have an inherent authority in his words because he was the Son of God, but there is reason to believe that he chose to perform miracles *as a man in the power of the Spirit* (e.g. Matt 12:28)

He faced and embraced suffering, refusing to disobey the Father and run away - again this was by the enabling of the Spirit

In Acts we see the early Christians being empowered by the same Spirit performing signs and wonders, and standing firm in the face of suffering and persecution. Most of us would love to perform miracles, but would prefer not to suffer! But whatever God has in store for us, his Spirit will sustain and empower us to endure. (2 Cor 12:9; Phil 4:13)

3. The Word and the Spirit belong together

They have a common focus: The Word and Spirit both point us to Jesus

The Word is the book of Jesus; it reveals truth about Jesus.
The Spirit glorifies Jesus; he reveals the beauty of Jesus.

The Spirit inspired the Word (e.g Heb 3:7 "the Holy Spirit says"; 2 Tim 3:16)
The Word tells us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) and the Spirit prompts us to be filled with the Word
The Word says "have you received the Spirit?" the Spirit says "have you read my book?"
The Word helps us to understand who the Holy Spirit is, and the Spirit helps us to understand what the Word says

There is a synergy between Word and Spirit – they work in harmony:
The Word orients us (points us in the right direction) and the Spirit energises us (pushes us forwards)
The Word gives us the truth and the Spirit gives us the power
The Word tells us how to behave and the Spirit enables us to live that way
The Word tells us that God is our Father, and the Spirit helps us to relate to God as Father

3.1. Word and Spirit belong together in fighting sin

The Word of God educates our consciences, teaching us what is wrong
The Spirit of God provokes our consciences, convicting us of sin
The Word shows us what needs to change, the Spirit empowers us to live differently

Excursus –Three Lies of the Devil

The reason we need the Spirit to help us face temptation is that we are weak
The reason we need the Word to help us face temptation is that the devil tempts us by telling us subtle *lies* which we need to counter with truth

1. "*You've blown it*" - the Word tells us that we are not unforgivable (1 John 1:9) and that we are children of God
2. "*It won't affect you*" - the Word warns that we are not invulnerable to temptation. The Word and Spirit will both lead you to avoid certain danger situations.
"Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good character" (1 Cor 15:33)
"flee idolatry/sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6:18; 10:14)
"lead us not into temptation" (Matt 6:13)
The devil is trying to get us to put confidence in the flesh - he knows pride comes before a fall
3. "*You can't change*" - the New Covenant gives us hope for overcoming habitual sin - we *can* change because we are new creations (2 Cor 5:17) and God's Spirit lives within us (1 Cor 3:16). The Word does not ask us to do anything that the Spirit cannot enable us to do.

3.2. Word and Spirit belong together in doing good

The Word of God motivates and inspires us - it shows us the things that God loves e.g. "giving, encouraging, serving"
The Spirit of God moves and empowers us to seize practical opportunities to do what is right - he says "give money to this person, phone that person, go on this mission trip"

3.3. Word and Spirit belong together in guidance

The Word of God gives us principles by which we may make wise decisions, and may evaluate different options.
The Word of God helps us to rule out foolish or sinful choices straight away
The Spirit of God never contradicts the Word, but may sometimes give us faith to take an option that may not be the obvious choice

We learn to discern the voice of the Spirit by reading the Word - we discover what he loves (Eph 5:10)

3.4. Word and Spirit belong together in preaching and teaching

The content of the message must be the Word of God or it is mere emotion
It must be delivered in the power of the Spirit or it is mere information

Aspire to be preachers, teachers, disciplers of others. The church needs many. But we are not passing on information or techniques, we are leading people to be filled with the Word and Spirit themselves.

3.5. Word and Spirit belong together in worship

Jesus said that his worshippers must worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)
The Word belongs in worship – it is to be read, prayed and sung
The Spirit belongs in worship – be open to the gifts of the Spirit, and expectant to *encounter* the presence of God

3.6. Word and Spirit belong together in mission

The Word of God gives us the great commission, and commands us to be missionaries wherever we are.
It is the Spirit of God who prompts us to speak to individuals, go on mission trips, and gives us the boldness to do this

The Word of God is the content that we proclaim – there must be a message (Rom 10:14)
The Spirit of God causes that Word to be effective in the hearts of those who hear

3.7. Word and Spirit belong together in spiritual warfare

The Word of God makes us aware of the nature of the spiritual battle we are in. It makes us aware of the devil's schemes in our personal lives, to tempt us, in the church to disunite us and to divert us, and in the world to kill, steal and destroy.

The Spirit of God enables us to resist the devil, and to go into battle against him. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). Living without Word and Spirit is like rushing into battle with no sword – you might not die, but you won't defeat anyone.

3.8. What happens when we separate them?

They are in fact inseparable, but that hasn't stopped people trying!
Those who focus on the Word and exclude the Spirit actually end up with legalism or moralism
Jesus said to the Pharisees, the great experts in the Scriptures:
Matt 22:29 “But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Ezek 11:19,20 “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.”

Those who claim to have no need of the Word because they just sense the Spirit's leading are ignorant of the numerous people in church history who have attempted the same and ended up in heresy.

4. Encountering the Word and Spirit

God has given these wonderful gifts but they can be left unappreciated and unused. *Make it your life's ambition to be as full as you can of Word and Spirit.*

4.1. Personally

Seek to meet God daily and regularly in the Word

This does not require a lot of time, but it does require a little discipline (often the main battle is going to bed a bit earlier)

There is nothing legalistic about this! We are receiving grace not earning acceptance.

Reading your Bible is spiritual warfare - the devil wants you tired, distracted, bored, and confused. So wake yourself up, free yourself from distractions, pray for God to help you understand, and find some good devotional aids.

Four types of Bible reading:

big picture – read your way through the whole Bible in a year, or through one book several times

study – ask questions of the text, use study guides and commentaries, find out how it applies to your life, what it says about God

devotional – find the prayers in the Bible (e.g. Psalms, the Lord's prayer, epistles) and use them as the basis for your own prayers

meditation – if you memorise verses from the Bible, or put it on your iPod, you can recall it to mind throughout the day, and think deeply about what it means

Seek to be filled daily with the Spirit

This involves prayer - time alone with God in a quiet place

God will often start to give us something of his heart for who he wants us to pray for and what he wants us to do or stop doing.

Prayer flows out of reading the Word - our petitions should be informed by the Word and our praise inspired by the Word

Make use of the gift of tongues

How do I know if I am filled with the Spirit?

Being filled with the Spirit is always experiential, but not necessarily dramatic

We know we are filled because the fruit of the Spirit are manifest (Gal 5:22,23)

Being filled changes our *feelings* (we experience *joy* in the midst of trials, *peace* instead of anxiety, a knowledge of the *love* of God for us) and also our *actions* (we are *patient* instead of losing our temper, *self-controlled* when tempted, we are *bold* instead of timid in a witnessing opportunity)

4.2. Corporately

We need one another if we are to remain filled with Word and Spirit. *The church's Sunday gathering should be serving a banquet of Word and Spirit.* Get connected with a church where you find your soul refreshed by the water of the Spirit and your mind fortified by the Word of God.

Similarly in a small group we go to feed on the Word and drink of the Spirit, but it is more like a bring and share lunch – we should go intending to encourage others even if we are not on the 'rota' to do something.

Too many Christians are suffering from spiritual malnutrition or spiritual dehydration. Even worse, some are suffering from spiritual anorexia - they are spiritually dying!

Ultimately the reason we want to be filled with the Word and Spirit is that they bring us to God. He is the one who can satisfy our deepest hunger and thirst.

Isa 55:1-2 “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.”