

The sword of the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

You might remember that I asked you to go back and check all those verses on your outline. I don't know if any of you did, but if you did, you would have spotted one mistake.

And that is, I talked about the Spirit as the first fruits last week. And I said Romans 8.27, but it's actually Romans 8.23. So you might want to correct that.

And there's also an outline again this morning. And I really encourage you and highly recommend that you use it. It will be of great help today. And again, just like last week, I won't necessarily directly quote all the verses, but I will, all the verses that inform the sermon, they're all on there.

And you can check it out for yourselves. But let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for today. We thank you that you are a God who reveals yourself to us.

[1 : 24] So I pray, Lord, that as I proclaim your word this morning, may your Spirit take those words and plant it deep into our hearts. And may you enlighten us, open up our minds and open up our hearts that we might know you personally once again.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. Now, before we begin, let me just tell you a little about how this sermon is going to proceed. You'll find that for the first part of this sermon, I'll be talking a lot about God the Father and God the Son.

And you might be puzzled and wonder, wait a minute, aren't we in the middle of a series on the Holy Spirit? And don't worry, we will be focusing on the Holy Spirit.

And in particular, a sign of Him that we take all too often for granted. But I need to set the scene first. As throughout this sermon, I'm going to be building a case.

And so if for the first ten minutes or so, you don't hear anything about the Holy Spirit, don't worry. We'll get there. So let's get going. And to begin with, I want you to imagine that I am in a room with some people who know absolutely nothing about me.

[2 : 38] And they are trying to get to know me. So they guess. By the way, in this scenario, they're not allowed to go on the internet and look up Facebook or Google me.

So somebody might say, hmm, I'm guessing that you are a computer nerd who happens to like chess and watching anime. Someone else might chip in.

Hmm, I'd like to imagine that you're a Singaporean who owns a cat and has two sisters. Or as someone once actually said to me a long time ago, you look like you have an A-mat face.

Whatever that means. Now you could go on like this for hours. You can keep guessing. And you might get close to the facts.

You might not. But the thing is, in the end, how would you really get to know me? How would you know you are right?

[3 : 40] Now let's apply this question to God. How would you get to know God? Well, just like those people in that room, we could guess.

I think God is like this really fierce guy who created the earth and who watches over it to ensure that good people get rewarded, bad people get punished.

Or maybe, I like to think of God as someone who is there for me, ready to help me when life gets too hard and then coach me through it.

But in the end, how would we really get to know God? How would we know if we are right or wrong? There's really only one way, isn't there?

To know me in any meaningful way, you need me to tell you about myself. You need me to say, actually, I'm born and bred in Kuching.

[4 : 38] I was once a youth group leader here at KEC. I've lived in three different countries in the last 15 years. And by the way, I'm rubbish at AMETS. So to truly know me, you need me to introduce myself.

To say what I'm really like, rather than just guess. And it's the same with God. To know God in any meaningful way, God must introduce himself.

We need him to say what he's like. So that's the first thing to keep in mind. God must introduce himself. Now, because God is God, and not simply a mere human being, it's not as straightforward for him to introduce himself to us.

There are a few complicating factors. For one thing, John 1 verse 18 tells us, No one has ever seen God.

In the earlier scenario, you could at least see me. But according to 1 Timothy, God is invisible. And then consider who God is.

[5 : 56] He's this incredibly big and infinite divine being. Whereas, quite simply, we are not. Now, let's say I wanted my son, Lucas, to know our late Chief Minister, the Behinsree Adnan Satem.

Now, I could very well try to tell him that he was our CM, that a lot of people love what he stood for, that he was a University of Adelaide graduate, that he was the President of PBB.

But all these concepts, Chief Minister, University, PBB, wouldn't make much sense to him right now.

He's only two years old. He is limited in his understanding. And that's what we are like in relation to God.

As one of Job's friends rightly says, Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above.

[7 : 02] What can you do? They are deeper than the depths below. What can you know? So he's unlimited. We're limited.

And here's one more complicating factor. To go back to me and my son again, let's think about how he responds when I try to tell him about our late CM.

Does he sit there attentively? No, within three seconds, he's gone off to do something else. When I tell him to sit still, he doesn't obey. He's not interested.

He prefers to do his own thing. And that's what we are like too. Romans 1 tells us that we are not interested in knowing the truth.

We actually prefer not to know who God really is. We want to do our own thing. To use the terminology of the Bible, God is perfect.

[8 : 06] We are fallen. But here's the second thing to keep in mind. God wants to introduce himself. You see, even before the world was created, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit already existed.

And John tells us that the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. So not only have they always existed, they have always loved.

There has always been this deep circle of love at the heart of the universe. But here's the amazing thing. Jesus tells us he wants to include us into that circle of love.

In John 17, verse 26, Jesus is talking to his Heavenly Father. And this is what he says, I have made you, that's God the Father, known to them, that's believers, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them.

Do you see what he's saying? Jesus wants to make the Father known to us because he wants us to enjoy the same love the Father has for him.

[9 : 39] Do you have a hero that you admire from afar? Someone you look up to? Nicole David and Ambiga Srinivasan, Tony Fernandez?

How would you feel if they wanted to know you? Well, God himself, the heartbeat of the universe, wants to know you.

God wants to introduce himself. And here's the third thing to keep in mind. God has introduced himself in Jesus.

Here's John 1, verse 18 again, but this time let me read the verse in full. Sorry, the... There you go. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Now remember the complicating factors to knowing God? Well, God doesn't let that stop him. God is invisible. So Jesus becomes the image of the invisible God.

[10 : 57] Jesus himself says, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. We can't come up to God's level. He's unlimited.

And so God comes down to our level by taking on the limitations of a human being. And of course, God deals with our fallenness as Jesus goes to the cross, defeats sin, and thus reveals God as he really is, perfectly just and perfectly loving.

So that's all fantastic. But now, another problem arises. I wonder if it's crossed your mind already. It's great that God has introduced himself in Jesus.

But Jesus isn't here anymore. I can't talk face to face with him now, like those clouds did 2,000 years ago.

And even back then, the disciples had to face up to this as well. In John chapter 13, Jesus tells them that he's leaving. He's going back to the Father.

[12 : 13] And so the disciples get anxious. What now, they ask. What becomes of our relationship now that you're going, Jesus? And we ask similar questions.

Now that Jesus isn't here anymore, what now? How is God going to talk with us? How do we hear his voice?

Does Jesus have to come back every once in a while? Like when my brother visits me once a year from London? Well, God's answer is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the key. That's Jesus' own answer to the disciples. In John chapter 14, verse 16 to 18, he reassures them.

And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The Spirit of truth.

[13 : 19] I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. That word another is important. Jesus is saying, I'm going, but don't worry, I will send you another advocate.

Another like me. In other words, the Holy Spirit is how we can still be introduced to God.

It's how we can still listen to God today. But how does it work? That's the key question, isn't it?

all throughout history, and even in the present time, there's been some dispute and lots of confusion about this matter. For example, in the 17th century, a group known as the Quakers believed that the Holy Spirit directly and immediately spoke to them because they had what they called the inner light within them.

So is that how he works? By speaking to us today the same way Jesus conversed directly with the crowds 2,000 years ago?

[14 : 40] Well, we need to go back to the Bible to find out. And for the rest of today, I'm going to keep building a case to show you how the Holy Spirit speaks.

So let's keep moving. now, when I relate to you, I have to use words, don't I?

If I mime to you like this without language, I just go. I can't communicate with you deeply and meaningfully. You have no idea what I am trying to say.

You need me to use words. And so it's no surprise that when God relates to us, he uses words. John 3, verse 34 tells us this.

For the one whom God has sent, that's Jesus, speaks the words of God. For God gives the Spirit without limit. And so he's saying the Word of God filled with the Spirit is speaking the words of God.

[15 : 55] And so no wonder people were always astonished whenever Jesus spoke. No wonder they said no one spoke like him. And no wonder Jesus' words are said to be full of the Spirit and life.

His words are God's words. But now that he is going away, how do we access his life-giving, God-revealing words?

Answer, the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, John 14, verse 26, says, but the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said.

The Holy Spirit is going to make sure that Jesus' words live on. Now, it's important to remember the context.

Jesus is speaking here to the apostles, not us. This is his promise to the apostles, not us.

[17 : 16] After all, we cannot be reminded of Jesus' many parables, or his calming the storm, or his raising Lazarus from the dead, if we were not actually there in the first place.

And so he's speaking to the apostles. He's saying to them, the Holy Spirit will help you, apostles, remember what I did and what I said.

The Holy Spirit, to use the theological word, is going to inspire you. And so he will connect the words of God, the words of Jesus to the apostles.

And that's so important because as we said at the beginning, God is unlimited and we are limited. So how can our finite, limited human words describe the infinite God?

How can they tell the whole truth about Jesus? Answer, when those human words are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 35] Now this is affirmed in John 16, verse 12 to 14. Jesus, still speaking to his apostles, says this, I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. And so the Holy Spirit helps the apostles to join the dots.

They had so little understanding before, but now, after the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit helps them get it.

They will know how all of God's plans, all of God's purposes, all of God's truth fit together. They will learn what the Lord wants to make known to them and what best brings glory to the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 51] And they will go on to testify in the Spirit's power about Jesus. The Apostle Paul pretty much makes the same point in 1 Corinthians chapter 2.

In chapter 2 verse 6, he says that he has a message of wisdom. Now, in the context of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 to 2, that's referring to the gospel, not just any random wise saying.

Because back in chapter 1, the gospel has been described as the wisdom of God. Now, that message looks like foolishness to the world.

After all, from a human perspective, a message about a crucified Messiah is stupid. It looks weak. But Paul says, God uses this supposed foolishness to save people.

And this wisdom, he says in chapter 2 verse 7, is what he now declares. And how can he be social? Well, chapter 2 verse 10 tells us these are the things God has revealed to us by his spirit.

[21 : 12] You see, he says, think about it like this. When I look at our brother Charles in front of me right now, do I know what he's thinking?

No, I don't. But who does know? He does. His own spirit knows. And so it is the same with God.

Only God's spirit knows the thoughts of God. That's the point of verse 11. And then in verse 12, the spirit does not keep that knowledge to himself, but he reveals it to the apostles.

He helps them understand all the things Jesus taught and showed to them. And so that's why in verse 13, the words that they speak are not merely human words.

They are human, of course, for people like Matthew and John and Peter speak from their different personalities and their remembered experiences. verses. But they are at the same time the words of the spirit.

[22 : 32] They are spirit taught words. And that's why 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 21 goes on to describe the apostles as being carried along by the spirit when they sat down and began to write what is now our New Testament.

Now, that's no surprise. For even back in Jesus' day, the Old Testament has the same spirit inspired character.

For example, back in Matthew chapter 22 verse 43, let me just show it to you on the screen. While debating the Pharisees, Jesus quotes Psalm 110 to them.

And in verse 43, he affirms that the psalm is the word of David, but also the word of the Holy Spirit.

The psalm comes to us in human words, which at the same time are spirit inspired. So, what does that mean?

[23 : 48] It means we should think of the entire Bible, the Old Testament and New Testament as the Holy Spirit's words.

The Bible is how he speaks. It's his book. Indeed, spirit and word go so closely together that the Bible is described as the sword of the spirit in Ephesians 6, chapter 6, verse 17.

And we can also see this close relationship in the way new birth is described. You see, if you were to look at John 3, verse 5, how are people born again?

It's by the Holy Spirit. But then if you flip over to 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 23, how are people born again?

It's by the word of God. Are John and Peter contradicting one another? No, of course not.

[25 : 00] For it is by the Spirit through his word who brings people to new life. So let's think through what that means for us today.

Here's one very important implication. Don't separate what God has joined together. Don't separate word and spirit.

Have you ever heard people talk like this? Ah, church acts is strong on the word, whereas church y is strong on the spirit.

By which I guess they mean that church acts has a strong focus on sermons, Bible studies, and so on, whereas church y is big on worship and authentic spiritual experiences.

But notice what is being assumed. It assumes that the word and the spirit are on opposite sides of the room, that they are not holding hands at all, that they are not connected with one another at all.

[26 : 16] But I hope you are beginning to see why that is wrong. We cannot separate the word and the spirit that way because the Bible is the sword of the spirit.

A church that is strong on the word is strong on the spirit. A church that is strong on the spirit is strong on the word. You cannot be strong on one and not the other.

They go together. It's not 50% word, 50% spirit. No, it's 100% word, 100% spirit because the Bible is the sword of the spirit.

A church that truly takes the Bible seriously and seeks to build upon the word of God is always a spirit filled church. And a church that takes the Holy Spirit seriously and wants to honour him is always a church driven by the Bible.

That's why it's one of our core convictions. And any church or any person that claims to be spirit filled but doesn't put the Bible at the centre by definition is not truly spiritual no matter what they say, no matter even how many miracles they perform.

[27 : 45] For truly spiritual people will make an effort to listen to the spirit's words clearly. Imagine for a moment that I got a Valentine's postcard for my sweetheart.

She has lovingly crafted every single word. But I don't bother to read it. I just dump it into the bin without a second thought.

When asked about it, I protest. Oh, I still love her. It's not about the words after all. You would think that's nonsense, wouldn't you? You can't separate the person from the words just like that.

God's love. And so, how can you glorify the spirit if you ignore his love letter? And on the other side of the coin, how can you treasure the words of a Valentine's card but not its author?

And so, one of the greatest tragedies of the last 40 years on the Malaysian church scene is the general failure to recognize that this is how God's spirit and God's word relate to one another.

[29 : 02] They've forgotten that the Bible is the Holy Spirit's words. And so, we get all this confusion about how God speaks. So, let's not separate what God has joined together.

What else does this mean for us today? here's another application. Personalize the way we think about the Bible.

Personalize the way we think about the Bible. In our car, there's a manual for the baby car seat. It's useful, especially when we first have to learn how to set it up.

But we probably don't think much about the author behind the words of those manuals. we have zero relationship with him or her. I certainly don't read the manual as a way of relating to the author, to him or her.

And that's how we can view the Bible, like a manual, but certainly not as a way to relate to its author. But of course, as mentioned earlier, what about a Valentine's postcard from your beloved?

[30 : 22] Now, that's different, isn't it? Because when you read it, you are not following a manual. You are hearing your beloved's voice.

You hear the person behind those words. And that's what I mean by personalising the Bible. By personalising, I don't mean that we make the Bible mean whatever we want it to mean.

if your beloved writes on the postcard how much she loves seafood, but you took it to mean that she loves satay, well, you've twisted the meaning of the words, haven't you?

And you're not showing love to your beloved when you do that. So that's not what we mean by personalising. We don't read our own meaning into the words of the Bible.

the spirit doesn't mean now what he didn't mean then. What we are getting at is that we're connecting those words on the postcard to a person whom we love and respect.

[31 : 33] And similarly, we connect the words of the Bible to a person. For that's what the Bible is. God himself speaking to us by his Holy Spirit through human beings.

And this will change the way we think about our Bible reading and our Bible studies. Let's say that we read a passage and we grasp its main point.

Let's say the main point is God is loving. And we might think boring, especially if we've been Christians for a long time. Boring, basic, I know this already.

And if we treat the Bible as information to be downloaded, like a manual, then of course it's boring. It's information that we already know.

Fact one, God is loving. Okay, tick. Fact two, the Bible is God's word. Okay, tick. Fact three, Jesus did miracles. Okay, tick.

[32 : 43] Information stored. No need to keep repeating. Let's move on to more advanced things. But imagine this instead. Imagine someone came to you and told you a story about your best friend doing something kind, something loving.

Now, because you've known your best friend for many years, you already know that he's a kind and loving person. But when you hear this particular story of how he's particularly kind and loving, do you say, boring, basic, I already knew that?

No, of course not. You delight in hearing once again about the love of your friend. Your confidence in your friend is strengthened.

your anxiety that your friend might not be there for you is lessened. It wasn't that you didn't know what your friend was like before, but your heart is impacted once again by this testimony.

And perhaps you didn't realize that he could be loving in this particular way. And reading the Bible is more like the second scenario than the first.

[34 : 09] When we understand that the Bible is the Spirit's book, and the way that God now relates and communicates to us as a person, it changes us.

And so when we see God in action through the prophet Hosea marrying a prostitute, when we read about the way that Jesus treats the Samaritan woman at the well, we don't think, oh, I already knew God is like that, I learnt it in Bible class ten years ago, I have that piece of information on my brain's hard drive.

No, instead, his word would grab us and impact our hearts. As we are wowed again by God's love, the Spirit is wielding his sword.

When Paul says in Ephesians, you were dead, we were dead, by grace we have been saved, we are his workmanship, we don't just think, oh, how nice, Paul is teaching new Christians basic information about sin and salvation.

No, when the Spirit wields his sword, we think of those words in Ephesians 2 as direct address. Oh my goodness, God said that I was a corpse, but he resurrected me, 20 years as a Christian, and I still can't get over how much he loves me this way.

[35 : 44] And then when I hear Ephesians chapter 4, I urge you then to live a life worthy of the calling, while I hear it as direct address to, not just words spoken thousands of years ago to some guy named Paul.

God is speaking and calling me to live for him. And so I want to respond to those words because those are the words of my God, given by his Spirit as living words to me.

One more implication briefly. words to be. If the Bible is the Spirit's words, the Bible is sufficient. Now sometimes we can be tempted to think of words itself as weak and fragile.

They are just words. The Christian social commentator Osginus once observed, we are not in a day of the word, but a day of the eye.

By that, he means that visuals, signs, icons are more captivating to us compared to words. And yet we often underestimate the power of words.

[37 : 11] Just think about the act of a judge pronouncing someone guilty, for instance. With his word, just one word in fact, he is changing somebody's life.

Or think about looking at an art exhibition. You're looking at the picture, you're struggling to make sense of the abstract art, but then you read the words underneath the picture, and suddenly you understand what the picture is about in a way that you never could on your own.

Words have power. And so if human words already have more power than we realise, how much more the Spirit's word.

We see this already when we realise that his word has the power to give new life, new birth, to spiritually dead people. And if he wrote the Bible, the Bible contains everything we need.

To say that the Bible is not enough, and we need more, is to actually tell the Holy Spirit that he didn't do a good enough job. Now, this isn't to say that God cannot speak in other ways.

[38 : 30] Of course, he can send dreams and visions, and he sometimes does. No one is denying that. But he hasn't promised to speak to us necessarily in that way, whereas he has promised to speak to us in the Bible.

And so his word is sufficient and powerful. So the Holy Spirit speaks to us today through the Spirit-inspired words of the Bible given to us by the apostles and prophets.

But that's not all he does to help us relate to God. There's one more thing he does. The Holy Spirit illuminates the reader.

Remember what we said near the beginning? God is perfect. We are fallen. We cannot hear. We cannot see. And if that's true, actually, the Bible is of no help to us unless God intervenes.

That's the point of 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

[39 : 57] In other words, no one on their own has any hope of understanding the Bible and thus no hope of relating to God.

Now, non-believers might have many insights regarding the Bible. They might know a lot about the cultural background or the grammatical connections between the Bible's many passages, religious, but they cannot grasp the main point.

They cannot understand what it's really all about. But thank God, anyone who trusts in Jesus receives the Spirit and if he does, he will have the mind of Christ as verse 16 puts it.

And so he wouldn't just understand things of interest like cultural background, he would rejoice in knowing Jesus for himself. Because he reads the Bible with the Spirit, he will personally know God.

So think of the Holy Spirit as someone who deciphers code for you. A few weeks ago, BBC carried an article about a student who had cracked a code that had left academics scratching their heads for generations.

[41 : 19] A Baptist theologian from the 19th century, Andrew Fuller had written hundreds of pages of shorthand notes, but no one knew how to read them. But the student and his supervisor worked it out and suddenly they could read his notes, his sermons, his stories.

Suddenly, they could understand. Or to use another illustration, imagine that there's a beautiful painting by Raphael Scott Arbank, one of Sorawad's foremost artists in a room.

But you can't see the painting because it's pitch dark in the room. But then the room gets lit up and now you can see the picture in all its glory.

Well, that's the Holy Spirit. He breaks the code, he lights up the room so that we can see and understand. And this is something he keeps doing.

Paul prays in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 17 to 18, Lord, may your spirit keep working in me. Open the eyes of my heart so that I can know you better and better.

[42 : 34] And so the Holy Spirit opens our blind eyes and then he keeps correcting our vision. I've been a fan of the Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S.

Lewis since I was young. I've read the series multiple times. When I first read it, I knew the basic story that it's a Christian allegory. But when I studied medieval literature at university, I began to see that Narnia was also full of medieval images that I had not noticed before which makes sense because C.S.

Lewis taught medieval literature. My eyes were being further open. And that's how the Holy Spirit works in us as we read the Bible. That doesn't mean that there is no hard work involved.

In 2 Timothy 2 verse 7, Paul says that we need to reflect on his spirit-inspired words. We need to pay attention. We need to use our brains.

And as I said before, the Holy Spirit does not arbitrarily change the meaning of what he's written. And so we need to respect his intention.

[43 : 47] But as we go to the author of the scriptures for help, while the Lord himself gives insight, he gives illumination. And so we don't have to despair that we can never understand the spirit's words.

You don't need to have a PhD to understand the Bible. You don't need to be a professional theologian or historian. As you humbly depend upon the Holy Spirit while you search the scriptures, you can understand what the Bible is saying.

And you can constantly pray for further illumination. You can pray to understand how those verses in its original context applies itself to our situation today.

you can pray that God will raise up good teachers, good teachers, good Bible study leaders who have been given gifts to help explain and bring the scriptures alive for you.

And you don't have to despair that non-Christians can never know Christ. On their own they can't. But the Holy Spirit can open their blind eyes, as he did ours, so that we can see Jesus for ourselves as we meet him in the Bible.

[45 : 11] So as we end, I hope you are encouraged that although God is not physically present with us in the person of Jesus now, we can still hear his voice.

We can still delight in it. All thanks to the Holy Spirit and the words he has given us. so let us not take the Bible for granted.

Let us take the Bible seriously, not because we worship the Bible per se, but because we know what the Bible really is. God himself speaking to us by his Holy Spirit through human beings.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.