On the Holy Spirit
(Part 6 of 7: Guiding into All Truth)

Historic Faith Series on Holy Spirit

XIV. He Will Guide You into All Truth

a. Read **John 14:26** and **John 16:12-13**.

i. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (**John 14:26**, NKJV)

ii. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." (**John 16:12–13**, NKJV)

b. **Question:** Jesus says the Spirit will teach "you" all things, and guide "you" into all truth. *Who* is included in the "you" that Jesus is referring to?

i. The way we answer the question above has enormous consequences regarding how we understand revealed spiritual truth!

ii. **Possible Answers**: Within the greater Christian world, I have heard of three possible ways to answer this question:

1. **Option 1:** The "you" applies to *the church* (or at least to the church fellowship that the reader happens to be a part of !). Therefore, *the church* over time continually is being guided into all truth.

2. **Option 2:** The "you" applies to *every individual Christian*. Therefore, I personally am being guided into all truth (but would be all the other Christians living now, and earlier).

3. **Option 3:** The "you" applies only to *the apostles*, the ones who were in the room with Jesus when He was speaking. Therefore, they (only) would be guided into all truth.

iii. **Many Protestants** tend to see the "you" in this promise (those who will be taught all things and be guided into all truth) *as referring to each individual believer*.

1. This perspective: When I am studying my Bible on my own, the Holy Spirit is leading me (personally) into all truth.

a. Of course, *if that is true*, the Holy Spirit *also* must be doing the same thing to my neighbor across the street, leading all the other Christians, everywhere, to "all truth".

2. A rather obvious problem with this approach: all the believers and all the churches are arriving at all kinds of divergent and contradictory conclusions!

a. How can the Holy Spirit be guiding all these different people and churches into *different truths* that contradict one another? Clearly, that is not possible!

iv. **Roman Catholics** tend to see the "you" as referring to *the church*. They hold that Jesus is promising here that the Spirit will guide *the church* into all truth; and that this will continue over time, *through progressive revelation*.

1. Since Roman Catholics believe their church is the original one, they therefore apply this promise (only) to the Roman Catholic Church.

2. An example, from the National Catholic Register (oldest Catholic newspaper in the U.S.; owned by EWTN, a large Catholic cable TV and radio media company):

a. "In **John 14:26** and **16:13** Jesus says that the Holy Spirit 'will lead you into all truth.' The [Roman Catholic] Church learns things through the ages. Theological or spiritual knowledge did not cease to grow or expand after the apostles. We still reflect upon doctrines today."

b. Notice that they assume that the "you" that Jesus promises will be guided by the Holy Spirit refers to the Roman Catholic Church.

c. Therefore, from these passages Roman Catholics conclude that the Holy Spirit is continuing to guide their church today into proper spiritual knowledge and doctrine (a word which simply means teaching). This would include revealing new truths *that were unknown to the apostles and to the early church*!

3. John (Cardinal) Newman wrote a famous explanation of this in 1848, in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

a. Newman taught that doctrine would develop like a person or a tree develops over time.

b. In chapter 2 of that work, Newman provides analogies of development through slow, successive steps, including:

   i. Seasons changing from one to another,

   ii. Ripening fruit,

   iii. Stages a flower goes through (bud to open flower), or

   iv. Human development (infancy to childhood to mature adult).

c. In the same chapter, Newman also says:

   i. "Lastly…Scripture…distinctly anticipates the development of Christianity, both as a polity and as a doctrine. In one of our Lord's parables 'the Kingdom of Heaven' is even compared to 'a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and hid in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree,' and, as Mark words it, 'shoots out great branches, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it.' (**Mark 4:30-32**)

   ii. "And again, in the same chapter of Mark, 'So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how; for the earth brings forth fruit of herself.' (**Mark 4:26-29**) Here an internal element of life, whether principle or doctrine, is spoken of rather than any mere external manifestation; and it is observable that the spontaneous, as well as the gradual, character of the growth is intimated."

4. According to Newman, the Holy Spirit will give the church <u>greater and greater understanding over time</u>, to further develop teachings (and possibly even to change them) over the ages. Examples of things that have been added to Roman Catholic teaching over the centuries include:

   a. A more precise delineation of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (adding that the Spirit proceeding from the Father <u>*and the Son*</u>)

b. Praying to Mary and the saints

c. Statues and images related to worship

d. Bodily assumption of Mary into heaven

e. Bishop of Rome as head of the church worldwide

f. Celibacy of priests/ presbyters

g. Precise understanding of transubstantiation (change in bread and wine during the Lord's supper)

h. Purgatory

i. Just war, crusades, non-separation of church and state

j. Whether those Christians who are outside the Roman Catholic Church can be saved.

5. Note that the Roman Catholic Church is now wrestling other potential changes in teaching, including:

a. whether divorced and remarried can participate in Lord's supper, and

b. the spiritual state of those actively involved in a homosexual lifestyle.

v. The early Christians understood the "you" is in these passages as referring to (and limited to) *the apostles*.

1. Let us re-read **John 14:26** and *consider the two promises made.* I believe this will help us appreciate who Jesus had in mind when He said "you".

a. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, *He will teach you all things*, and *bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*." (**John 14:26**, NKJV)

b. Jesus said, "the Spirit *will bring to your remembrance all things I said to you*".

c. From context, it should be clear that the "you" in this part of the promise referred to *those who had heard Jesus first-hand*. Therefore, it referred to *the apostles themselves* (rather than to the church in the future, or to each individual believer in future ages).

2. This view (that the twin promise made by Jesus in **John 14:26** applied to the apostles only) was held by the early Christians, from the beginning. The following quotes are from early Christian writers, taken from *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, edited by David Bercot, from an article on the *Apostolic Faith*.

    a. From Irenaeus (writing c. 180 AD), bishop of the church in Lyons, modern-day France, who in his youth had been taught by Polycarp, in Smyrna. Note that Polycarp had been a direct disciple of the apostle John.

        i. "It is unlawful to assert that the apostles preached before they possessed 'perfect knowledge,' as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as being improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, the apostles were energized with power from on High when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them]. They were <u>completely filled and had perfect knowledge.</u> They departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things sent to us from God."

            1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 1, p. 414)

            2. Irenaeus here is saying that anyone claiming to be *an improver* of what the apostles taught must be dead wrong. Because the apostles had been given perfect (meaning *complete*) knowledge, nothing would or could be added to it.

        ii. "True knowledge is that which consists in the doctrine of the apostles and the ancient constitution of the church throughout all the world. It also consists in the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession of the bishops. For by this they have handed down that church which exists in every place and which has come down even unto us. She is guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, <u>by a very complete system of doctrine</u>. She <u>neither receives any addition to, nor does she allow any diminishing of, the truths</u>

which she believes. True knowledge also consists of reading the Word of God without falsification, but with a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures—both without danger and without blasphemy. Above all, it consists in the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts of God."

1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 33; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 1, p. 508)

b. From Tertullian (writing c. 197 AD), writer from Carthage, North Africa.

i. "'When He, the Spirit of truth, will come, He will lead you into all truth.'(**John 16:13**) He thus shows that there was nothing of which the apostles were ignorant, to whom He had promised the future attainment of all truth by the help of the Spirit of truth."

1. (Source: Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, chapter 22; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p.253)

c. From a debate (written down c. 320) between Archelaus, a Christian bishop vs. Manes, the heretic who founded Manichaeism.

i. "As Paul himself seems to tell us, and as we have also learned from the earlier account given in the Gospel, to introduce new preaching, teaching, evangelizing, or prophesying is not (in this life, at least) held out on the same terms to any person in the later times [after the apostles]. And if the opposite ever appears to be the case, that person can only be held to be a false prophet or a false Christ."

1. (Source: *Disputation of Archelaus and Manes*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, p. 210)

ii. "Those who seek to set up any new dogma have the habit of very readily perverting into

> conformity with their own notions any proofs they care to take from the Scriptures.… The apostolic word marks out the case in these words, 'If anyone preaches any other gospel to you other than that which you have received, let him be accursed.' (**Galatians 1:8-9**) Consequently, in addition to what has been once committed to us by the apostles, a disciple of Christ should receive nothing new as doctrine."
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> 1. (Source: *Disputation of Archelaus and Manes*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, pp. 213-214)
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> 2. Conclusion: *No one* can add anything to the body of teaching handed down from the apostles.

3. In summary, how the early Christians understood this:

    a. Jesus' promise of being guided into all truth, and being taught all things, applied *only to the apostles*. It did not extend to others over time.

    b. When Jesus said they would be led into all truth, He meant it. They would receive the full and complete package of the teachings of the faith, from the Holy Spirit. No more would be added later.

    c. Anyone who claimed they could add to or change what was revealed to the apostles was to be rejected as a false teacher.

    d. Doctrine (teaching of the church) would not develop over time. It was handed down complete, fully developed.

    e. Our task is to guard, protect and advance the faith originally handed down. It was handed down complete. We are to make no additions, nor are we to delete anything; simply restore and hand down the original deposit of faith.

    f. The Holy Spirit will not give us any new truths to us (nor to change earlier truths given).

c. This teaching has critical implications for us today.

i. One recent example that comes to mind: a prominent Christian teacher, who clearly does not grasp this foundational concept that the Christian faith was handed down complete, to the apostles, in the beginning.

1. His claim: God is gradually revealing more truth to us over time. Therefore, church understands things now that were not understood in earlier times, even at the beginning.

a. He pointed to the example of the treatment of Blacks in the US: black slavery until the 1860's, followed by segregation, followed by civil rights.

2. He used this to advocate for new, more "progressive" views in the church, specifically to liberate women from Biblically defined roles.

a. He even went so far as to claim *that every passage of Scripture that speaks of a difference in the roles of men and women* can be nullified.

b. How do modern teachers justify coming up with outrageous conclusions like these? Because they mistakenly believe that the Spirit is leading our generation into "a *new, clearer understanding* of God's *true objectives"*. They believe they can understand things *more accurately than the apostles*.

c. Practical implications this teacher was proposing include:

i. women preachers and elders/bishops in the church;

ii. women leading men in the church and home; and

iii. a husband is no longer to be considered the head of his wife and family!

3. This teacher said that he and his wife had been experimenting with what is essentially a *headless marriage*, with no designated leader! Instead of leadership being determined by gender (husband leading the wife) he claimed it should be based on whichever one of them happened to be more naturally "gifted in leadership"!

a. However, Paul taught "For <u>the husband is head of the wife</u>, *as also Christ is head of the church*..." (**Ephesians 5:23**, NKJV)

b. Let us recall that Peter endorsed Paul's writings as *inspired, written with the wisdom given to him*. Anyone who tries to twist what Paul says (or anything else written in Scripture) is *headed for destruction*.

i. "…Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (**2 Peter 3:15–16**, NKJV)

c. **Question** (based on **Ephesians 5:23**)**:** If the husband is no longer head of the wife, what does that say about Christ and the church?

i. **Follow-on Question:** *If Christ is no longer head* of a church, why would any serious Christian want to remain there?

ii. Others use the same logic (considering themselves to be more enlightened than the apostles and more progressive than Scripture), to justify even homosexual lifestyle and homosexual marriage in supposedly Christian churches.

iii. In another recent example, a friend of mine had listened to a lesson by a (liberal) Mennonite preacher who said. "If you hear any preacher saying that women need to cover their heads, you should quickly *run in the other direction!*"

1. Clearly that preacher mistakenly saw Paul's teaching on head covering as oppressive to women, and something that could be discarded today in our supposedly "more enlightened" era.

iv. I hear others today saying that leadership should be exclusively "gifts-based". They conclude that if a woman has the ability to teach or preach (or has more natural "leadership skills" than her husband), this was a gift given to her by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they conclude that if these gifts (leadership, teaching) were given to her by the Spirit, she should not be impaired in exercising that gift.

1. However, *we know that the Spirit inspired the apostolic writers*, who placed limitations on the roles of women in marriage and in the church.

d. In a Christian world that today is very confused, let us respectfully restore the teaching that the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and led them into all truth. We cannot improve on what they handed down.

i. When Jesus told the apostles, "the Spirit… will guide you into all truth" (**John 16:13**), this promise applied to the apostles.

1. That promise did not apply to me personally.

2. It did not apply to the Catholic Church.

3. It did not apply to the church I belong to, nor to any group of church leaders.

ii. Therefore, we add nothing to the faith delivered to the apostles, and we take nothing away from it.

e. The early Christian understanding of this foundational teaching is supported by the Scriptures:

i. "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to <u>contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints</u>." (**Jude 3**, NKJV)

ii. "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (**2 Timothy 2:1–2**, NKJV)

1. I have heard this passage taken out of context to support a deviant form of discipling: "Whatever *I tell you*, you are then to tell others, who in turn will tell yet others." (Passing whatever you have been told down to others, who will then indoctrinate a third generation in the same way.)

2. Rather, Paul is telling Timothy that <u>whatever Timothy heard *from the apostle Paul*</u>, he should entrust to faithful men, who in turn would pass that along to others (the same things *that <u>Paul had said</u>*).

3. The challenge here for us: to uncover the treasure of the gospel message that was handed down to Paul and the other apostles; and to pass <u>*that great treasure*</u> down to others.

iii. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach <u>any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you</u>, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (**Galatians 1:6–9**, NKJV)

1. People are often impressed with people with special titles, seminary training or advanced degrees. They may lead large churches. They may even be eloquent or entertaining speakers.

2. Yet Paul says *even if he* (the apostle Paul) or *an angel who has come from heaven* should teach a different gospel than the one originally handed down, may that false teacher be cursed and cut off from God!

3. No person, no group of theologians, *not even another apostle or an angel* can change the gospel that was originally handed down by the apostles.

iv. "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen." (**1 Timothy 6:20-21**, NKJV)

1. The original Christian faith is a trust, a treasure, that has been handed down by the Holy Spirit to the apostles. We are called to guard it, defend it, and protect it.