

Holy Spirit would directly guide them (John 16:13). These promises were not to all believers—the means through which the Holy Spirit guides believers in general is through the word of God, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The pattern of Scripture is that when the Holy Spirit did speak directly to believers it was in words, in which the Holy Spirit speaks (I Corinthians 2:13). Any strong inclination of the heart which does not follow this pattern can not reliably be viewed as the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

By Kyle Pope



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# Faithful Sayings

## Olsen Park Church of Christ

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Vol. X, No. 36

September 7, 2008

### Services

Sunday: 9:30 a.m.  
 10:20 a.m.  
 6:00 p.m.  
 Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.

### Elders:

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 Charles Kelley  
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### Deacons:

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## When the Holy Spirit Speaks: Strong Feeling—or Words?

In our discussions with friends in the religious world, it is not uncommon to hear people claim that the Holy Spirit has led them to do or to say something. Many such people believe strongly that the Holy Spirit leads them in a direct manner, separate from the guidance found in the word. When questioned, in most cases, what they really mean by this is that they have felt a strong feeling within which led them to say or do something. It is always important to test all things by the standard of Scripture. On this issue, this is especially important, lest we find ourselves in the same position as the false prophets in the days of Ezekiel, “**who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing**” (Ezekiel 13:3).

Are there times in Scripture when the Holy Spirit spoke to Christians through a strong feeling? As a test case we can survey the accounts in the New Testament in which we are told that the Holy Spirit spoke. As a record of the early church, and a history of the Holy Spirit’s work in the church, how does it describe the Spirit’s guidance to Christians?

There are six instances in which such direct guidance is recorded. The first example relates to the preaching of Philip to the Ethiopian nobleman. When he sees the man in his chariot, Scripture tells us: **“Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’”** (Acts 8:29). We notice that the Spirit’s communication to Philip was clear, concrete, and in the form of a complete sentence. A second example, occurred when Peter saw the vision of the sheet lowered from heaven with animals in it. Scripture records: **“While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent**



**them”** (Acts 10:19-20). Here we see two complete sentences. One sentence expresses knowledge of things beyond Peter’s senses (i.e. there were three men). The second sentence commands certain behavior. These were not just vague feelings.

Two examples concern the prophet Agabus. The first reveals: **“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar”** (Acts 11:27-29). While this account does not reveal the specific words of the Spirit, the nature of the revelation indicates a great level of specificity. We note that the Spirit revealed to him there would be 1) “a famine”; 2) it would be “great”; and 3) it would span “throughout all the world.” The second came when Paul was returning to Jerusalem. The text records:

**And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s**

**belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’**

(Acts 21:10-12).

In this revelation there is not only a complete sentence but the command from the Spirit to the prophet to use a prop—Paul’s belt, to illustrate what would happen to him. We see this is much more than a strong motivation within the heart of Agabus. It is clear communication in words.

Two final examples both concern Paul. While in Antioch, we learn about prophets in the church in that city. Of these prophets, Scripture records: **“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”** (Acts 13:2-3). Here the Spirit identifies men by name—“Barnabas and Saul.” Here the Holy Spirit commands their appointment for a specific work. These are words which were spoken, recorded, and understandable. A final example, echoes what would be declared by Aga-



bus. Paul relates: **“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me”** (Acts 20:22-23). Here, once again, the Spirit uses clear words declaring that “chains” and “tribulations” await Paul. This was clearly not strong feeling, it was communication which could be recorded, written down, and clearly understood.

There is no question that the apostles were promised that the Holy Spirit would speak through them (Mark 13:11). There is also no question that the apostles were promised that the