

How the Spirit Leads the Church

Intro: This week the Episcopal church made history by agreeing at its general convention in Michigan to approve the ordination of an openly-declared practicing homosexual as a bishop of the church. I have spoken and written several things recently about homosexuality, so I'm not going there tonight. But in connection with the ordination process, I took note of the rationale for this decision.

In the context of those who pointed out that homosexuality was contrary to Scripture, the pro-homosexual advocates in the church attributed the decision to the "leading of the Holy Spirit" in the church.

Consider these quotes from Episcopalian preachers:

It has always been the position of the church that Episcopal elections, although requiring the balanced, majority voting of the clergy and laity in an electing diocese, is in fact a process guided and directed by the action of the Holy Spirit. Not to affirm the New Hampshire election would be, I believe, a challenge to the revelation of the Holy Spirit upon which Episcopalians and Anglicans throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion place great credence, faith and trust. The process of consent by the General Convention should not be a litmus test for the doctrine. Each diocese has the right to elect a bishop of its own choosing and also has the authority to be exposed to the direct action of the Holy Spirit. Not to live into this genius of Anglicanism....would seem to violate the integrity of the Episcopal Church's canons. (Statement by John B. Chane, Episcopalian Bishop of Washington, DC)

and whereas we believe the Church in New Hampshire has been inspired and moved by God's Holy Spirit in calling Gene Robinson as Bishop and in so doing has urged the Church at large to respect the dignity of faithful gay and lesbian persons within our Episcopal Church; (Resolution of the Vestry of St. Paul's church in the walls, Rome)

And so we find ourselves at a kairos moment in the history of this great church of ours – one that provides us with the opportunity to witness to the work of the Spirit among us if we will seize the moment – if we will catch the wave. ("Reverend" Susan, Sermon Preached at the Los Angeles Pride Eucharist, June 22, 2003)

The idea clearly portrayed in these quotes is that that the will of God is made known through the Holy Spirit in the decisions of the people, and not in the Scriptures themselves. If a sufficient number of people in the church agree that a thing is so, then it is "of the Holy Spirit" and "God's will".

This would be a good time perhaps to address the concept of the Holy Spirit's leading. The Episcopal church is not the only one that relies upon the "inner leading" of the Spirit to warrant what are manifestly un-Biblical positions.

Mormonism: When Mormons go fishing for men they know that the single

greatest barrier to conversion is the prospect's acceptance of the book of Mormon as inspired. So they give you a copy of the book and ask you to read it cover to cover then pray to God so he will reveal that it is true. They will quote Moroni 10:4 "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."

*Denominationalism: "The visible activity of angels has come to an end, because their mediating work is done; Christ has founded the kingdom of the Spirit, and the God's Spirit speaks directly to the spirit of man".
How then does the Holy Spirit lead the church?*

The promise of the Spirit's leading to the apostles

*"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13)
In this text Jesus promised the apostles direct guidance in knowing His will.*

The fulfillment of the Spirit's leading in prophecy and scripture

The Spirit guided NT apostles and prophets to orally declare God's message which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:5)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

The Spirit guided NT apostles and prophets to declare God's message in Scripture (writing).

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. (1 Corinthians 14:37)

The declaration of the cessation of prophecy

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)

Paul anticipated a time when God will discontinue miraculous revelation and its attending confirmatory miracles. The result of the process of revelation and its confirmatory miracles was to establish a written revelation for the ages. When that happened the "perfect" revelation of God would continue to guide the church.

The Spirit now leads through the written word

The Holy Spirit revealed Jesus' mind on homosexuality through the prophecies made to the apostles Paul. He was God's acknowledged spokesman, performing the "signs of an apostle" to confirm the truth of his message.

Those who profess to be directly guided by the Spirit perform no miracles and contradict what the Scripture says! They not walking by the Spirit, but in fact are "grieving the Spirit".

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

This expression is derived from Is. 63 where Isaiah reveals that the children of Israel rebelled against Moses and the teachings that the Holy Spirit gave through Him.

When we reject the NT teaching we are "set up" to approve and practice whatever our own inner thoughts declare. Thus subjective thoughts conditioned by the society around us are exchange for objective truths of the Scripture.

Conclusion: So now people tell us that the Holy Spirit is telling them to believe what the Holy Spirit once said was wrong! It is not the Holy Spirit that is guiding such people to set aside the plainly revealed teaching of Scripture.

Let us reaffirm our intention to be led by the Spirit of God on every matter of faith and practice.