

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY FIVE

The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

The Spirit of God is a reservoir of knowledge and truth. With comfort and compassion, He takes the things of God and reveals them to us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Holy Spirit usually ministers behind the scenes, operating in subtle ways rather than making His presence obvious. So slight is His touch and faint His whisper that we often are surprised to realize, upon later reflection, that the Holy Spirit was at work, giving us divine insight when we needed it most.

Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would “teach” them everything they needed to know and “remind” them what Jesus said (John 14:26). Also, the Spirit would “guide” them into the truth and “disclose to [them] what is to come” (16:13 NASB). Teaching, reminding, guiding, and disclosing. These are the Spirit’s behind-the-scenes ministries that often go unnoticed but are so essential to our spiritual life and well-being.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll consider how the Holy Spirit illumines our minds and how He gives wisdom to help us untangle a knotty problem or make a difficult decision. We’ll learn to be more sensitive to the Spirit’s gentle hand moving in the secret chambers of our hearts.



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1

The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps you are at an impasse in a relationship or at a crossroads regarding an important decision. Maybe you need insight from Scripture or clarity about God's will. James wrote,

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. (James 1:5)

Use the space below to lay your situation before the Lord and to ask for His wisdom. As you open God's Word, invite the Holy Spirit to teach, remind, guide, and disclose God's way to you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus surprised His disciples when He told them, "It is best for you that I go away" (John 16:7). But then He reassured them that only by His leaving could the Holy Spirit come to indwell and empower them. The Holy Spirit would be the wind beneath their wings as they went out as witnesses. He would be the divine power giving flight to the disciples' mission, convicting "the world of its sin" (16:8), and leading sinners to Christ.

Jesus' promise about the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in Paul and modeled in his ministry. In *1 Corinthians 2:1–13*, Paul described his total reliance on the Holy Spirit's power in his missionary work in Corinth, and the results that followed were remarkable. Let's take a closer look.



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13



Observation: Paul's Example of the Holy Spirit's Inner Ministry

Paul had just come to Corinth from Athens, where he had the opportunity to speak to Greece's elite philosophers, the Council of the Areopagus. Paul delivered a superb explanation of the gospel, but the response was mixed. Take a moment to read what happened in [Acts 17:32–34](#).

As far as we know, Paul never planted a church in Athens. Perhaps this experience confirmed what Paul already knew—the success of the gospel didn't depend on human powers of persuasion.

Silver-tongued philosophers were a dime a dozen in Greece, and people expected a good show whenever one came to town. So, when Paul arrived in Corinth, he presented himself as just the opposite, a working-class tentmaker ([Acts 18:1–3](#)). Let's observe in 1 Corinthians 2:1–13 four workings of the Spirit that characterized Paul's life and ministry.

The Spirit Demonstrates God's Unique Power—1 Corinthians 2:1–5

What did Paul determine *not* to do in Corinth, according to [1 Corinthians 2:1](#)? Instead, in [2:2–4](#), what did Paul say he did?

What reason did Paul give for his approach with the Corinthians, according to [2:5](#)? Why is this mind-set toward ministry so important in our day as well?



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

The Spirit empowered Paul's message, his leadership, and his style of ministry. As a result, the awesome presence of God was felt. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Spirit Searches God's Hidden Wisdom—1 Corinthians 2:6–10

Not only did Paul refuse to rely on his power of persuasion, he also refused to preach what kind of wisdom, according to *1 Corinthians 2:6*? Why not?

Instead, Paul preached God's plan to offer salvation to the whole world through Christ. What did Paul say about the nature of this wisdom in *2:7–8*? From whom was the wisdom of God hidden?

According to *2:9–10*, to whom was the wisdom of God given? What essential role did the Spirit play in Paul's ministry?



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

We can't learn from books the depths of God's truth. God's truth must come from a member of the Godhead, and the one appointed to that task is the Holy Spirit, who lives within every child of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Spirit Reveals God's Deep Thoughts—1 Corinthians 2:11–12

According to *1 Corinthians 2:11–12*, what treasure does the Holy Spirit offer only to believers? What makes it possible for us to receive this treasure?

At the moment of salvation, we were given the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit came to live within us, ready to reveal to us the wisdom of God, the deep things of God when we need them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Spirit Teaches God's Profound Insights—1 Corinthians 2:13

Paul knew that the wisdom and power in his ministry didn't come from him. What was Paul's role, according to *1 Corinthians 2:13*?



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

Because the Spirit works behind the scenes, Paul didn't need to put on a show to convince people to follow Christ. All Paul needed was the *Paraclete*—the name for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament to express His vital role in our lives. Let's take a closer look at this important word.

 **Interpretation: The Meaning of *Paraclete***

Word studies help unlock the meaning of a passage and inform our understanding of a theological concept. Read the five verses in which the Greek word, *paraklētos*, appears in the New Testament, all written by John. Summarize what John said about the Paraclete, which referred not only to the Spirit but also to Christ. Note how various Bible versions translate the word, as well as the alternate translations.

Verse	Summary
<i>John 14:16</i>	
<i>John 14:26</i>	
<i>John 15:26</i>	
<i>John 16:7–8</i>	
<i>1 John 2:1</i>	

Finding an English equivalent for *paraklētos* is difficult! The Greek word is made up of *para*, which means “alongside,” and *kletos*, which means “called.” So, the Paraclete comes alongside to help and counsel, but if we had to choose one meaning to describe the Paraclete’s central function it would be advocacy—a function that describes the work of both Christ and the Spirit and on which Paul totally depended.

The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

Why did Paul intentionally preach “in weakness—timid and trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3)? What did Paul count on the Spirit to do on his behalf?

Reflect on the verses in the chart above and write your definition of *paraklētos*. What does the Spirit do for you as your “behind-the-scenes” Paraclete?

In place of weakness, the Spirit brings power. In place of ignorance, He brings knowledge. In place of human understanding, He brings divine wisdom. In place of superficiality, He brings the depths of God’s plan. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Unfathomable Depths of God

The wisdom Paul preached was not found in books or taught him by rabbis. His wisdom came from the Spirit, who dives into the depths of God to bring us His hidden treasures of truth through God’s Word.

What praise did Paul offer to God in *Romans 11:33–36* about the lofty nature of God’s wisdom?



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

Without the Spirit's help, the deep wealth of God would forever be out of our reach. So, join Paul in praise. "Come boldly and confidently into God's presence" (Ephesians 3:12), seeking His wisdom for your situation.

Application: Relying on the Spirit's Surprising Ways

In his book, *Embraced by the Spirit*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll lists some surprising moments in which he has received the Holy Spirit's wisdom.

- Biblical insights I would otherwise have missed
- A sudden awareness of God's will, the presence of danger, or a sense of peace in the midst of chaos
- A surge of bold confidence in a setting where there would otherwise have been fear and hesitation
- A quiet, calm awareness that I was not alone, even though no other person was actually with me
- The undeniable, surrounding awareness of evil . . . including the dark sinister presence of demonic forces¹

Can you identify with Pastor Chuck's experiences? Which inner ministry from the Holy Spirit have you experienced?

As we saw in this study, Paul relied completely on the working of the Spirit in his life and ministry. What aspect of Paul's example stands out as a guide for you in your situation?



The Spirit Who Surprises

1 Corinthians 2:1–13

Write a prayer inviting God's Spirit to act as your Paraclete in your situation.

Perhaps now you can better recognize the Spirit's subtle movements in your life and work. When you sin, Jesus is your advocate, pleading "[your] case before the Father" (1 John 2:1). When you pray, the Spirit is also your advocate—teaching, reminding, guiding, and disclosing the wisdom you need at just right time you need it. Look for evidence of the Spirit's gentle movement in your heart this week. He may surprise you!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, open my hands to receive Your wisdom. Open my eyes to see Your way. Open my heart to feel the Spirit's touch. Through the Spirit's indwelling presence, remind me of Your truth, disclose Your hidden path, and guide me in Your will. I refuse to act in my own strength. Instead, I yield to the Holy Spirit's power to act through me in surprising ways as only He can. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Embraced by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 92.

