

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Resources for Christ-Centered Discipleship

Martin Luther once said most Christians have enough religion to feel guilty about their sins but not enough to enjoy life in the Spirit. This morning I believe God wants us to think again about enjoying life in the Spirit.

It is no exaggeration to say that the greatest things God want to do in your life, in your family, the things that will bring the most fulfillment, joy, and strength to you and your loved ones and the most honor and pleasure to God, are things that can be done only through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the Apostles' Creed we confess our faith in God the Holy Spirit. We say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

One of the interesting things about the Creed is that its structure reflects the teaching of the Bible and Christian theology on the Trinity. The word *Trinity* is used to describe the truth that there is one God who exists as three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This triune, or trinitarian, nature of God is reflected in the Apostles' Creed.

The Creed begins with a focus on God the Father, our almighty Creator.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

The second section of the Creed is about God the Son, our Lord and Savior.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

The third section of the Creed is primarily about God the Holy Spirit and the benefits of salvation that He brings into our lives as a church and as individuals.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

When we think about the Holy Spirit, we need to remember what the Bible teaches about the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not just a force or an expression or a part of God. The Holy Spirit is a person who, like the Father and the Son, is fully God.

I like what J.I. Packer writes about this:

In itself, the divine tri-unity is a mystery, a transcendent fact which passes our understanding. . . . How the one eternal God is eternally both singular and plural, how Father, Son, and Spirit are personally distinct yet essentially one (so that tritheism, belief in three gods who are not one, and Unitarianism, belief in one God who is not three, are both wrong), is more than we can know, and any attempt to explain it--to dispel the mystery by reasoning, as distinct from confessing it from Scripture--is bound to falsify it. Here as elsewhere our God is too big for his creatures' little minds (J.I. Packer (*I Want to Be a Christian*, pp. 29-30)).

This is important because it tells us that the Holy Spirit is worthy of our *reverence*. He is not to be ignored, grieved, or quenched. This tells us that the Holy Spirit requires from us a *relationship*. The Holy Spirit is not a force to be manipulated but a person whose companionship we cultivate in a relationship of reverence.

One of the most important things for us to recognize is that . . .

The Holy Spirit Is Present for Us Today

in a Unique Way

John 7:37-38 tells how, in the later part of His ministry, Jesus stood and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the

Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." In verse 39 John explains: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

That last phrase is profound. The life, the ministry, the crucifixion, and the glorification of Jesus has brought about a radical new era in our relationship with God. There is a *before* and *after* here. Up to the time of the glorification of Jesus, the Spirit had not been given in the way that He is given now. We are living in a new era when the Spirit of God is given in a new way to those who thirst, and come, and drink, and believe.

In This Present Age, If We Come to Christ, He Meets the Two Great Needs of Every Human Heart

One of the more dramatic moments in the gospel of John takes place when John the Baptist first identifies Jesus. John the Baptist has been sent as the last in a long line of prophets of God to prepare the people for the coming of the Savior of the world. He is calling people to repent, to turn from their sins and to turn back to God. He is baptizing them in the Jordan River as a symbol of their repentance. Then one day it happens, the thing that he has been waiting for. John looks up, sees Jesus, and says, so to speak, "This is the Savior." In the verses that follow, John identifies the two ministries--you could say two gifts--that are distinctive of the whole mission of Jesus.

The first is found in verse 29. *It's the gift of forgiveness.* John 1:29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

The second gift is found in verse 33. *It's the gift of the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit.* John 1:33 reads, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"

If we put John 1:29 and John 1:33 together, we discover that the characteristic, ongoing, distinctive work of Jesus in this present era is twofold. It involves a removal and a bestowal, a taking away of sin and an in-pouring of the Holy Spirit. For those who receive Him, these are the two great gifts of Jesus Christ for us in this present age.

Imagine a man who has not only committed a terrible crime but is also afflicted with a deadly disease. Imagine a man who stands in a courtroom guilty of a crime that is deserving of the death penalty and who is also afflicted with a cancer that is sure to be terminal. Until you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, that's where you stand in the presence of God. Not only are you guilty of

sin against Him that will ultimately condemn you, but you are also sick with a disease of the heart that will ultimately destroy you.

What do you need? You need forgiveness for your sins, but you also need healing for your heart. Forgiveness is the act of God as a merciful and gracious judge freeing us from the guilt and penalty of our sins. The renewal of the Spirit is the work of God as a merciful and loving physician healing our hearts from the disease of sin. To use theological terms, forgiveness is part of our *justification*, which is a once-for-all event. The baptism and renewal of the Spirit is part of our *sanctification*, which is an ongoing process.

Forgiveness is a once-for-all, one-time event. God as the judge in the courtroom declares us forgiven, and it's done. As far as our eternal salvation is concerned, everyone who is forgiven is forgiven perfectly, completely, and equally.

The renewal of the Spirit begins with the new birth and the baptism of the Spirit but then continues as a lifelong process. God, the great physician of our souls, continually cares for us and offers us the ongoing process of inward healing through the ministry of the Spirit in our hearts.

God doesn't just forgive you and then leave you a pardoned criminal who is being slowly destroyed by an ugly disease. He not only pardons, but He also pours out His Holy Spirit on you so that you might be healed, transformed, from the inside out.

Your responsibility is twofold: You need to receive the forgiveness that is offered you in Christ, and you need to cooperate with the healing process that God's Spirit has begun within you.

The Gift of the Spirit That Brings Renewal of Life Is Called the Baptism of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

What is the baptism of the Spirit? The baptism of the Spirit is the gift of God's grace in which He gives you, as one who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the gift of the Spirit to live inside you forever, to unite you to His body the church, and to refresh, renew, equip and empower you for Christian life and service.

Every one who receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receives, with Him, the baptism of the Spirit. Notice the emphatic repetition of "all" in 1 Corinthians 12:13. "For we were *all* baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were *all* given the one Spirit to drink."

Notice also the repetition of the word “one.” We were all baptized by *one* Spirit into *one* body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the *one* Spirit to drink.”

The emphasis here is that this baptism of the Spirit is not something that divides Christians into those who have it and those who do not. The baptism of the Spirit is a gift of God that unites all true Christians. The Spirit is given to everyone who receives Christ. So when Jesus came, John the Baptist said, “I baptize with water but this is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” This is what Jesus does when you receive Him. It is characteristic of His work in us. That ought to make a tremendous difference in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is present at this point in history in a unique way, and because of that . . .

The Holy Spirit Calls Us to Live a New Way of Life in Him

What does the Holy Spirit do in us?

The Holy Spirit Enables Your Heart to Feel the Weight of Christ's Glory

In John 16:14, Jesus says, “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” There is an important insight into the work of the Holy Spirit in those words.

In the Bible, the idea of glorifying something finds its roots in the Hebrew word kabod, which literally means “to make heavy.” So you glorify something when you give it weight. To glorify something is to give it weight and significance and importance. What the Holy Spirit does is take the realities, truths, gifts, and graces of Christ and causes us to feel the “weight”--the importance--of them on our hearts and in our lives.

The Holy Spirit does this first of all in drawing us to Christ. Maybe you always believed that there is a God. Maybe you even believed in Christ, but it never meant very much to you. It never carried much weight on your heart. Then at some point you found that these things mattered. They weighed something. Why is that? That's the Holy Spirit. He causes us to feel the weight of the goodness and grace of Christ. He causes us to feel the weight of our need of Him. Our responsibility is to respond to what the Holy Spirit is doing by allowing ourselves to feel the full weight of the glory of Christ and opening ourselves to the heartfelt knowledge of Him.

The Holy Spirit continually works to impart to Christians a sense of the weight of the goodness, grace, and glory of Christ. For example, Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” For many people that is just a concept. But what should it mean for us?

David Martyn Lloyd Jones was by no means just a fluffy, sweet-talking preacher. He preached at one of the most famous churches in London. He was known as a committed Calvinist and a strong Reformed preacher of the old school. In his commentary on Romans 8, he says what Romans 8:1 means for you is that, if you have received Christ, you must never feel condemned. You must never act as if you are condemned or treat yourself as if you are condemned.

If you are in Christ, through faith in Him there is no condemnation for you. When God looks at you, He sees Christ. *That means He treats you as if you have already paid the ultimate price for your sins.* He treats you as if you have already died for your sin and have been raised again from the dead. That is the spiritual truth about you in Christ. What the Holy Spirit does is take that concept and make it not just a concept but a felt reality. He glorifies Christ and reveals the things of Christ to your heart, so that you feel the life-giving weight of them. The Spirit works in us, and we cooperate with Him in that work by opening ourselves to His influences and feeling the weight of the glory of Christ as He reveals Christ to us.

The Spirit of God enables us to feel the weight of the glory of Christ and . . .

The Holy Spirit Empowers Us to Live a Christlike Life

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ reproduced in our lives. As the Holy Spirit makes Christ real *to us*, He produces the character of Christ *in us*. It takes time. The fruit has to grow naturally and ripen to maturity.

You have an important part to play in the process of becoming fruitful. You have to rely on the Holy Spirit's power, listen to His voice, and follow His leadings.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24-25). Scripture is saying that to be a Christian is to have died to the old way of life and to have been reborn to a new life by the Spirit. The same Spirit who has given you life is now to be given the lead in your lives.

Ask yourself if there are areas where you are out of step with the Spirit of God. Maybe He is leading you to face some uncomfortable truth about yourself so that you can confess your sins and follow Him more closely. Maybe you are tempted to resist or deny that. Don't harden your heart. Be responsive to the leading of the Spirit. What is He saying to you? Where is He leading you? None of us has arrived, so there is a next step for all of us. What's the next step for you? If you don't know, ask Him to show you.

What hurts you and grieves the Spirit of God is the habit of resisting and refusing the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is hypocrisy for us to pray to be empowered by Him while we go on refusing to be responsive to Him. Yet, even if we have failed many times, if we repent, if we confess our sins and ask Him to fill us and lead us, He is gracious. He will do it over and over again. Open your heart and listen!

Sometimes it's easy to refuse the Spirit of God. Our emotions rise up and confuse us. We react out of hurt feelings or old habits. Our pride clenches up like a fist and doesn't want to let go and listen to what the Spirit of God is saying. One of the symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Bible is a dove. It's easy to resist a dove. It's easy to shoo a dove away. To make progress in our spiritual lives, we must learn to say no to those thoughts and emotions that are coming from hurt and pride and hardness and unbelief and say yes to the influences and whispers and leadings of the Holy Spirit.

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes:

The checks of the Spirit come in the most extraordinarily gentle ways, and if you are not sensitive enough to detect His voice you will quench it and your personal spiritual life will be impaired.

The Spirit of God enables us to feel the weight of the glory of Christ and empowers us to live a Christlike life. But also . . .

The Holy Spirit Makes Real to Us the Presence of Christ

In John chapters 14-16, Jesus gathers His disciples in a small second-story room just before He goes out to be grabbed by a mob, rushed through a series of trials, and then hammered to a cross. In those last hours with His disciples, Jesus promises that after His death and resurrection, this day and age in which we are now living, He will not leave us. The Holy Spirit will dwell in our hearts and make real in our lives the permanent, inward presence of Jesus Himself.

Practice His presence. Christ wants you to be aware of and acknowledge His presence within you. It's all through the Bible. First Corinthians 6:19 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?" In Ephesians 3:17, Paul's prayer is that believers would be strengthened by God's Spirit in their innermost being so that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith.

Remember that. Believe in His presence in you through His Holy Spirit. Don't treat lightly the indwelling presence of Christ. Give it weight, feel the sweet weight of His presence by His Holy Spirit, practice His presence. Listen to His leadings, yield to His impressions, rely on His power. Cultivate the companionship of the Holy Spirit so that you can open your heart to a more deeply spiritual, Christ-centered life.