

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	37		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	John 14:15-21; 16:7-13		
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I Believe in the Holy Ghost

20. Lord's Day

Question 53. What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

Answer: First, that he is true and coeternal God with the Father and the Son; (a) secondly, that he is also given me, (b) to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all his benefits, (c) that he may comfort me (d) and abide with me for ever. (e)

(a) 1 John 5:7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. Gen. 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Isa. 48:16 Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me. 1 Cor. 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 1 Cor. 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Acts 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. (b) Gal. 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Matt. 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Matt. 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. 2 Cor. 1:21 Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; 2 Cor. 1:22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. Eph. 1:13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, (c) Gal. 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. 1 Pet. 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. 1 Cor. 6:17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. (d) Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: (e) John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 1 Pet. 4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

The rendering of the Hebrew RUACH and the Greek PNEUMA into the English “Ghost” originally was not the least bit misleading. The word is derived from the Middle English “gost” or “goost” and the Anglo-Saxon “gāst” which meant “breath” or “spirit”¹ which is exactly what the Biblical words meant. Words undergo change and the word “Ghost,” which now implies a *spook* or something frightening, is no longer an appropriate translation. We noted that the Apostles’ Creed is structured around the work of God the Father (in creation), God the Son (redemption) and God the Spirit (sanctification). “I believe *in the Holy Spirit*: so starts the Creed’s third paragraph. From the creating work of the Father and the rescue work of the Son, it turns to the re-creating work of the Spirit, whereby men are actually made new in and through Christ. So we hear of *church* (new community), *forgiveness* (new relationship), *resurrection* (new existence), and *everlasting life* (new fulfillment). But first comes a profession of faith in the Spirit himself.”² I personally doubt if there has been a more controversial subject among Christians over the last few decades than this one. Beginning with the birth of Pentecostalism at the turn of the century and with the explosion of the Charismatic movement in the 1960’s and 70’s (continuing on and on in what is now called “The Third Wave”),³ the subject of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit has taken center stage in the church. Charismatics point to this as evidence of God’s blessing on them and predict that the future success of the church is entirely in the hands of Charismatics.⁴ I, on the other hand, see this from a different angle. Within both the wider culture and evangelicalism, there has been, as Lane Dennis recently noted, “a broad shift away from the thinking (and reading) toward feeling and experience. The result in the Church is a superficial feeling (experienced-based theology rather than an in-depth, carefully thought out Christian commitment.”⁵ This is especially the case when we turn our attention to the present day Charismatic movement. David F. Wells makes this telling observation: “Many charismatics have made the experience of God rather than the truth of God foundational. The self therefore becomes pivotal. This, in turn, links with the deep subterranean sense of progress that is inescapable in America, as the proponents of this movement tout it as the most recent cresting of the Spirit. Here is the cutting edge of progress in what God is now doing. This by itself is a validation of all that takes place within this movement and within its churches. In America, it has always been hard to quarrel with success; it is even more futile when there are those who are convinced that the success has been divinely produced. Yet, if one understands modernity, it is not difficult to imagine that much of what is vaunted as the Spirit’s work may have causes that are rather more natural. Nor is it difficult to understand that where a religion is busy accommodating itself to culture there will be a period of success before the disillusionment sets in. In the end, those who promote the sort of Christianity that accommodates the culture always have to answer the question as to what they are offering in Christ that cannot be had from purely secular sources.”⁶ Seeking visions or striving to receive some kind of special revelation or speaking in tongues – are these really the Bible’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit? “The key to understanding the New Testament view of the Spirit’s work is to see that his purpose is identical with the Father’s – namely, to see glory and praise come to the Son.”⁷ We direct our attention today to the personality of the Spirit.

I. THE OTHER COMFORTER

Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as *another* Counselor. The language used here implies that the Spirit is a counselor *just like Jesus*.⁸ It is important to note that Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit is in some ways like Himself – the Spirit is a Person, not an energy force. Hodge writes: “Those early heretical sects, general styled Monarchians and Patripassians, all with subordinate distinctions taught that there was but one person as well as one essence in the Godhead, who, in different relations, is called Father, Son, or Holy Ghost. In the sixteenth century Socinus, who taught that Jesus Christ was a mere man, maintained that the term Holy Ghost is in Scripture used as a designation of God’s energy, when exercised in a particular way.”⁹

II. THE SPIRIT'S PERSONALITY

- A. The personal actions ascribed to Him abundantly prove that the Spirit is a person (John 14:26, I Corinthians 12:11).
- B. His distinction from the Father and the Son, and His mission from both, prove it (John 15:26).
- C. The co-ordinate rank and power which belong to Him equally with the Father and the Son prove it (Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14).
- D. His appearance under a visible form at the baptism of Christ and on the day of Pentecost proves it.
- E. The sin against the Holy Spirit implying a Person proves it.
- F. The way in which He is distinguished from His gifts proves it (I Corinthians 12:11).

III. THE SENDING OF THE SPIRIT

This would happen on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). "We must," wrote John Murray, "appreciate the place of Pentecost in the accomplishment of God's redemptive purpose. It is a cardinal even to be placed alongside the death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly ministry of Christ."¹⁰ Note that the sending of the Spirit is ascribed to both the Father and the Son. The era of the holy Spirit has been inaugurated. But Pentecost is specifically a Christological event (cf. Colossians 2:11-3:4).

IV. THE CAPACITY IN WHICH THE SPIRIT IS SENT

He is called the *Comforter* or *Counselor*. Note the context. How does the Spirit comfort Christ's people? By means of truth revealed in God's Word. He is the Spirit of truth and Christ's people will be sanctified by the Word (John 17:17). It is the function of the Spirit to enable us to not only understand the meaning of Scripture but to be gripped by it so that it convicts us and moves us to obedience. Thus the Scriptures are the instrumental means whereby the Spirit comforts and directs believers (cf. Romans 15:4, 13 and Psalm 119:25, 28).¹¹

CONCLUSION: The blessed Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, seeks to glorify Christ. This is His *chief* function. This is how the Spirit brings comfort and strength to Christ's people. He discloses the unsearchable riches of Christ to those who implore His presence and activity.¹² Has the glory of the Person and work of Christ captivated your heart *and* mind? If so, it is because the Spirit of truth has powerfully worked in your life. This is what the Holy Spirit delights to do and He will not cease to do so until all of Christ's people have been transformed into the likeness of the Son of God.¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. Joseph Bosworth, *A Compendious Anglo-Saxon and English Dictionary* (John Russell Smith, 1855), p. 103, and Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of English Language* (Oxford, 1911), p. 211.

² J.I. Packer, *The Apostles' Creed* (Tyndale, 1984), p. 70.

³ The phrase was coined by church growth pioneer and Fuller Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner in 1985 to describe the invasion of Charismatic emphasis into the rank and file of Evangelicalism. Cf. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S.M. Burgess, G.B. McGee (Zondervan, 1988), p. 875.

⁴ Harvard professor Harvey Cox in his recent work *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Addison Wesley, 1995) says the struggle for the soul of Christianity is between “fundamentalism” (which he identifies with belief in the verbal inerrancy of Scripture and the emphasis of the Protestant Reformation) and “experientialism” which emphasizes a wide array of intuitive, less analytical spiritualities of which Pentecostalism is representative (pp. 300-319). Cox clearly hopes that “experientialism” wins out. Jack Deere in his book *Surprised By the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), makes this rather boastful statement: “I believe that ultimately the Lord wants to change the whole church. I believe that in my lifetime the majority of the church is going to believe in and practice the gifts of the Spirit. All of the current statistical evidence from church growth studies indicates that the church is moving swiftly and inevitably to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. The church is returning to its first-century heritage. I am completely convinced that until the whole church embraces the gifts of the Spirit, we are losing a significant measure of our effectiveness.” (p. 173).

⁵ Lane Dennis cited by John Armstrong in *Viewpoint* (March/April 1997, Vol. No. 2), p. 2.

⁶ D.F. Wells, *No Place for Truth Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 173-174.

⁷ Packer, op. cit., p. 70.

⁸ The word for “another” is ALLOS which means another of the same kind. Cf. the usage of Paul in Galatians 1:6-9 of the Greek text where ALLOS is contrasted with HETEROS.

⁹ A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 174.

¹⁰ *Collected Writings of John Murray III* (Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 211.

¹¹ “It were a dangerous error to suppose that the Spirit comforts his people, by infusing peace and joy and hope into their hearts without the use of the ordinary means of grace, or separate and apart from his other fruits and operations as their teacher and sanctifier.” James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (The Banner of Truth, 1966), p. 280.

¹² “The Paraclete,” writes D.A. Carson, “is the Spirit of truth primarily because he communicates the truth... Coming so soon after 14:6; where Jesus claims to be the truth, ‘the Spirit of truth’ may in part define the Paraclete as the Spirit who bears witness to the truth, i.e. to the truth that Jesus is.” *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 500.

¹³ “The ministry of the Spirit in this increasing identification with Jesus is in order that, being ‘shaped’ as messianic Spirit by the life and ministry of Jesus, he may come to us thus qualified to reshape us to be ‘like Christ,’ from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:17-18). This is the central function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer.” S. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 56.