

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	41		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	John 14:15-21; 16:7-13		
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AND WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE (Part 2)

The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 20, Question 53, asks:

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 forever. (e)

In Psalm 139:7, David asks, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" "And this is not just any spirit," as Cary points out, "but the Spirit of the LORD, as the Old Testament puts it. Thus it is the *Holy Spirit*, uniquely set apart from all spirits in creation, and also the source and giver of holiness and sanctification (Romans 15:16). The name in Latin, *Sanctus Spiritus*, shows us the origin of the word *sanctification*, which comes from *sanctus*, meaning *holy* (used of a person, it means *saint*). Thus to sanctify is to make holy, to hallow or consecrate. At the same time, the word *spirit* (*ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek, *spiritus* in Latin), which in all three languages can also mean *breath*, suggests a uniquely intimate relationship with the life in all creatures. We keep finding the Holy Spirit *within* creatures, like the breath of life that is in them."¹ The Psalmist's question clearly underscores the point that the Spirit of God is omnipresent. Christopher Ash, in his masterful work on the Psalms, says: "This headline verse may be read negatively or positively. On the negative reading, David is like Adam and Eve trying to hide in the garden of Eden; he seeks to flee from God because of a guilty conscience; he wants to **go from your Spirit and flee from your presence**. But he cannot. Augustine thinks of the prodigal son, running away and yet unable to rest. Others suggest Jonah fleeing to Nineveh. We see this dynamic in Amos 9:2 and Jeremiah 23:24. John Calvin speaks of it *being impossible that men by any subterfuge should elude the eye of God*. But the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24 suggests that the primary meaning in this psalm is the positive thought that *even if I were to be taken far from the God who knows me, I could never be beyond his presence and care*. The verbs may have a modal sense (*where could I go, even if I were to try*). We see this positive sense in David's plea in 51:11. As Andrew Bonar says, these words are *not the utterance of the First Adam, slinking from sight behind the trees of Eden; but . . . the utterance of the Second Adam, dwelling in the blissful fellowship with God, which fellowship he would not for all worlds ever lose*. **Your Spirit** means here God's breath to give and sustain life (cf. Ezek. 37:5-14) and hence the personal, divine Spirit by whose ministry *God the Father and God the Son make their home in the life of the believer* (John 15:15-18, 23)."²

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.³

- 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*.⁴ 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.”⁵
- II. **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.”⁶ 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).⁷
- III. **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).

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.⁸ 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.⁹ I once had a charismatic classmate tell me that he was sure that his charismatic experience was valid because the Holy Spirit guided him claiming the promise Christ made in 16:13. Is that what this text teaches? No. Listen to the words of Abraham Kuyper: “The holy apostles appear in their writings as such, and not otherwise. St. John, the most beloved among the twelve, testifies that the Lord Jesus gave them as apostles a rare promise, saying, *He shall guide you into all truth*, a word that may not be applied to others, but to the apostles *exclusively* (emphasis mine). And again: *The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost shall teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things whatsoever I have said unto you* (John 14:26); which promise was not intended for all, but for the apostles only, securing them a gift evidently distinct from illumination. In fact, this promise was nothing else than the permanent endowment with the gift received only temporarily when they went forth on their first mission among Israel: *For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ Phillip Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 172.

² Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary III* (Crossway, 2024), p. 544.

³ J. I. Packer, *The Apostles' Creed* (Tyndale, 1984), p. 70.

⁴ 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*.

⁵ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 174.

⁶ *Collected Writings of John Murray III* (Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 211.

⁷ F. D. Bruner, in his epoch work, writes, “We may say, then, in theological summary of our studies to this point, that the Holy Spirit in biblical teaching is the almost wholly *functional* and intentionally non-objective member of the divine trinity, purposely hidden behind and operative in the illumination of the gospel of the Son. The gospel of Christ is the full gospel. There is no gospel of the Holy Spirit. To say this is not to deprecate the Spirit, it is to co-operate with his office which is to point – even if necessary away from himself – to the Son.” *A Theology of The Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and The New Testament Witness* (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 302.

⁸ “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.

⁹ “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, *The Holy Spirit: Concurs of Christian Theology* (IVP, 1996), p. 56.

¹⁰ A. Kuyper, *The Work of The Holy Spirit* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 153. Robert Letham points out that “the *all things* taught by the Spirit is so obviously not literal – the Spirit did not teach the early church the general and special theories of relativity – but refers to those things relating to Christ and salvation.” *Systematic Theology* (Crossway, 2019), p. 655.