

## **Series Apostles' Creed**

### **This Message: I Believe in the Holy Spirit**

#### **Scripture Romans 8:1-17**

Today we begin our examination of the third part of the Apostles' Creed. We will need to spend several weeks on this third paragraph which describes the activities of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is sometimes thought of as the quiet member of the Trinity. One reason for this is the subordinate role of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son. Scripture describes the Spirit as being "sent" by the Father and Son. In John 14 Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17); and also "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26).

In John 16 Jesus said, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Jesus also explained to His disciples the future ministry of the Holy Spirit: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears .... He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16:12-14).

During the time that Jesus was on the earth, the Spirit was mostly in the background. The Gospels focused on the life and ministry of Jesus. However, beginning on Pentecost Day, the activity of the Holy Spirit became much more prominent. The book of Acts describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles and the early church. Just before His ascension into heaven, Jesus had commanded His followers, "Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard me speak about. .... In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit;" and "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4-5, 8). The book of Acts is the historical record of the early expansion of the Church. This expansion was the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of believers.

On the day of Pentecost, the apostles and other followers of Jesus were meeting together. Scripture describes how “suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1-4).

A large crowd gathered when people heard the commotion, and Peter explained to the people that the phenomenon was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. God had said to the prophet Joel, “In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Acts 2:17). At the end of his message, Peter assured his listeners that the promise concerning the Spirit was “for all whom the Lord God would call” (Acts 2:39).

We are living in the era of the Church. This era has already lasted about 2000 years. The Holy Spirit is the energizing force in the Church. The Bible uses many words to describe the activities of the Holy Spirit: He hovers over, indwells, empowers, convicts, guides, gifts, teaches, and unites the people of God. Although we have a lot of verbs to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit, we still have a problem in describing Him. There is an “intangible” quality in His work because the Spirit does His work without drawing attention to Himself.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Spirit is compared to the wind, which “blows wherever it pleases.” This is a good description. We can see evidence of the wind when the leaves and limbs on the trees move, and sailing ships are pushed through the water, and clouds move across the sky. Likewise, we can see evidence of the Spirit’s activity, but His hidden invisible qualities make the personhood of the Spirit difficult to conceptualize.

The activity of the Holy Spirit is “behind the scenes,” but what we learn from Scripture is that the Holy Spirit is the personal creative “power” of the Godhead. We can recognize this in several ways. The first mention of the Holy Spirit in the Bible is in the second verse of Genesis. At the time of creation “the Spirit of God moved over the surface of the waters” (Gen 1:2). His task was to bring order out of primeval chaos.

In another context, the Holy Spirit is called the “breath” of God because He is the source of life to both animal and human kingdoms (Gen 1:30; 2:7) and He is the sustainer of life in all creatures. Psalm 104:29-30 states, “When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created. And you renew the face of the earth.” The Spirit of God is the basic life principle of the universe. Without the Spirit, there would be no life, neither physical or spiritual.

In the Old Testament we read that the Holy Spirit occasionally came upon leaders in crisis times to empower them with intellectual and artistic abilities and strength. When this happened, the Holy Spirit made it possible for ordinary men to do extraordinary feats. Prophets, judges, and builders were among those who were given special physical abilities to lead, guide, and protect the people of Israel. Let me mention a few examples.

In Exodus 31 we read about the man chosen by God to construct the tabernacle. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”

In the book of Judges, there were several leaders who were guided by the Holy Spirit to defeat the enemies of Israel. In Judges chapter 3, we read about one of these situations: When “the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; (and) forgot the LORD their God, .... the anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hand of .... the king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, .... who saved them. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. The LORD gave the king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.”

When Saul was anointed by Samuel and designated to become king of Israel, the Scriptures inform us that the Spirit of the LORD came upon him and he became a changed man (I Sam 10:6). The Spirit enabled him to prophesy and empowered him for action and he was successful in his first military venture (I Sam 11:6), but within a few years, Saul became disobedient to God and unqualified to continue to be the leader of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from him.

The Spirit of the LORD then came upon David, the successor of Saul. “Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on, the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power” (I Sam 16:13).

The Spirit was especially important in the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. The prophets were sent by God whenever the Israelites were in danger of judgment because of their sins. Ezekiel, for example, was filled with the Spirit so that he could be courageous when speaking to the rebellious Israelites. It was necessary for Ezekiel to be fearless because God said that “briers and thorns would be all around him and he would live among scorpions (Ezek 2:2-6). That was God’s unique way of describing the Israelites. Later, Micah stated “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8).

There are several passages in the Old Testament in which the Spirit is associated with the promised Messiah. I want to mention three of them. Isaiah chapter 11 mentions “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, and the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD” (Isa 11:1-2). Jesus was the fulfillment of this prediction, and these verses describe His incarnate life as the Messiah.

Another passage is in Isaiah 42. “Here is my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the nations will put their hope” (Isa 42:1-4). These verses were recognized by Matthew as prophetic of the healing ministry of Jesus and quoted in Matthew 12:18-20.

Another passage is Isaiah 61:1-2a, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor.” Jesus read these verses at the beginning of His ministry and said that He was the fulfillment; that He had come to do these things. See Luke 4:16-18.

As we can recognize, the Holy Spirit operated in the Old Testament in a variety of ways. Likewise, in the New Testament, the power of the Holy Spirit was also manifested in many ways. The first example occurred when the angel appeared to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus. The angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." The conception of Jesus was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the Holy Spirit was the agent of physical life in both Adam and Jesus. In addition, we know that the Holy Spirit enters the lives of spiritually dead people to give them new spiritual life. The theological term for this is "regeneration." Jesus explained the principles of regeneration when He spoke with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus said, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). Two verses later Jesus expanded on His initial statement, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Theologians disagree about the meaning of the word "water," but there is no disagreement about the reference to the Spirit. Entrance into God's kingdom is dependent on the Holy Spirit; new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual state of the person who is only born "one-time" is characterized by spiritual "deadness." That person is separated from God because of sin, and is under God's wrath and condemnation. The person who has been born a second time has been "regenerated" by the Holy Spirit. A new kind of life is given — new spiritual life. As Jesus said, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of ... the Spirit."

In this age, the Holy Spirit makes God real to us. His objective is to apply the redemption gained for us by Jesus Christ; and to bring glory to Jesus Christ. In our Scripture passage we read the words of the Apostle Paul, "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (Rom 8:11). Paul also said, "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" .... And the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:14, 16).

Christ's death on the cross reconciled us to God (Rom 5:10), and lifted the condemnation which was upon us as the enemies of God (Rom 8:1). "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set us free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). When we placed our faith in the good news of salvation, God "set His seal of ownership on us and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (II Cor 1:22).

I don't have time today to talk about all the benefits provided to us by the Holy Spirit, but let me mention some of them. Scripture explains that the indwelling Holy Spirit gives the believer security and confidence, hope, wisdom, and power over sin. He gives to every believer at least one special gift to be used to build up the Church. The Scripture describes the "fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 6:22). There are lots of benefits.

What comes to us from the indwelling Spirit is remarkable. Scripture states it this way: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." .... "No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (I Cor 2:9-12).

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