

The Holy Spirit and Its Work

The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of God and Christ

In creation and in the world of mankind, God exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each has an area of work, which is distinct from the other two: creation, redemption, and sanctification. As the Trinity, God works to save sin-fallen mankind.

The power and guidance of God's Spirit is first mentioned in the Old Testament creation story: "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Isaiah spoke of those who rebelled, and "vexed his holy spirit." Facing God's wrath, they remembered Moses and asked: "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy spirit within him?" (Isa. 63:10,11). The prophets also foretold the outpouring of the spirit in the end times (Isa. 44:3).

The wait for the coming Messiah was kept alive by the Spirit of God. At the time of Jesus' birth, Simeon, a just man, was waiting for "the consolation of Israel." The Holy Spirit was upon him, and revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Anointed One. Led by the spirit, he came to the Temple, took the baby Jesus in his arms, and praised God (Luke 2:25–28).

The prophecy of the Old Testament was fulfilled at Pentecost: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:3,4). In His farewell sermon, Jesus promises His own: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth... He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:13,14). The Holy Spirit continues the work of Christ in His congregation (CD, 44).

The Holy Spirit is the key to comprehending God's revelation. "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:20,21). The Spirit opens the Word of God and Christ.

The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of a Child

Every human being inherits the corruptive fall into sin at birth. But at the same time, each child also partakes of Christ's atonement work (1 John 2:2). We begin our life's journey in the secure faith of a child, led by the Holy Spirit, and under the grace covenant of baptism. When surrounded by a believing family in the care of the Holy Spirit, many are preserved as children of God.

God's children preach repentance and remission of sins to those who are awakened by God after losing their birthright (Luke 24:47). Peter preached the gospel in Jesus's name to Cornelius and his family. Thereafter, the Holy Spirit fell upon the listeners, giving them the gift of faith and the portion of a child of God. It was then possible to baptize these Gentiles "which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we" (Acts 10:43–47).

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Paul writes, “For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God... ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:14–16). A believer has the liberty of a child (2 Cor. 3:17). We trustingly approach the Father in prayer, and the Heavenly Father hears our petition. Believers are children in God’s family, brothers and sisters joined by love born of the same Spirit. The Spirit testifies that we are heirs of heaven. We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Without faith and the Holy Spirit, a person is under the judgment of the Law of Moses. But a person living in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is under the law of the Spirit through the merit of Christ. As Apostle Paul writes, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2–4).

Living according to the Spirit brings forth fruits that are the opposite to the works of someone living under the bondage of sin and the law. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22,23). Love, joy, and peace are the first fruits to blossom when someone receives grace to repent (Acts 16:33,34).

Jesus’s parable of the vine describes how God takes care of us in his congregation through His Spirit: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Jesus says of his disciples: “Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you.” The gospel message cleanses our corrupt flesh of bad fruit so that we can remain as living branches in Christ Jesus. Jesus says, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.” The fruits come from the Lord Jesus, not from within oneself (John 15:1–10).

The first and greatest fruit of the Spirit is love—love for the Lord Jesus as well as the other believers. This love receives its power from God’s perfect love: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiator for our sins. Behold, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:10,11). This love is also directed toward all our neighbors, since God has created each and every person, and has given up his dear Son to death on the cross for their sake as well as ours.

Fruits of the Spirit also include self-control—a desire to battle against the enticements of sin. Our flesh is prone to sin despite our owning the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul exhorts, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh... so that ye cannot do the things that ye would... And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the afflictions and lusts” (Gal. 5:16–24). Guided by the Spirit, we wish to preserve a good conscience before God and man. When sin attaches, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to confess our sins and believe them forgiven.

The Holy Spirit and Grace Gifts

God created us as individuals, and gave us unique capabilities and gifts to serve our own needs as well as our neighbors. But because of its corrupt portion, mankind often uses these gifts selfishly and for personal glory. However, the Holy Spirit employs these capabilities and gifts to enrich God's congregation. The Spirit awakens these grace gifts and calls us to serve. Everyone has a grace gift created by the Spirit. Paul writes, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal... But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:4–11).

Each of our organs has its own task in our body. Likewise, believers perform different functions in God's congregation. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:27,28). According to Paul, love is "by far the greatest of all" grace gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:1–13).

The Holy Spirit and the Office of Preaching

Each and every Christian is a priest of the Holy Spirit. Each can instruct and encourage with the Word of God, and act as a messenger of the gospel in his or her own life situation. Peter writes, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). This general priesthood belongs to every believer regardless of age or gender. However, the congregation occasionally sees the need to call new ministers of the Word. When God's Spirit indicates that a brother has grace gifts needed in the office of ministry, the congregation calls him to the duty of a minister. Often this takes place with prayers and laying on of hands. Paul warns against neglecting the grace gift that is given when the congregation elders lay their hands upon him (1 Tim. 4:14).

In Old Testament times, the office of preaching was held by prophets. Peter writes, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come upon you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us did they minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

The office of preaching is an office of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:7–9). In the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus read a prophecy about the Messiah, or Anointed One, from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue in his home town, Nazareth, saying: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

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to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Having read this, he spoke to the congregation: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:16–21).

Through John, the Spirit of the Lord anointed Jesus to the task of the Messiah at the River Jordan, where John baptized Jesus (Mark 1:9–11). The heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Moved by the Holy Spirit, Jesus began to preach: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Later, as the resurrected Lord, Jesus sent his disciples to preach the forgiveness of sins and appointed them to this task through the same Spirit, saying, “As my Father hath sent me, even so I send you... Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:19–23). On Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon all the disciples. Many who came to the Pentecost festivities believed the gospel, and then departed to proclaim the gospel in their home areas.

The task of a minister of the Word is not always easy. The Holy Spirit gives words and courage to do gospel work, and the sowers of the Word rejoice over the success of the work (1 Thess. 1:2–6). But preaching still feels overwhelmingly difficult at times. Paul writes that he arrived in Corinth “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” He especially wanted to impress the root of living faith upon the Corinthian believers, saying: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Paul further relates, “My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (1 Cor. 2:1–5) Even in the midst of persecution, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will give the power to confess one’s faith. Jesus encourages, “when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh within you” (Matt. 10:19,20).

The Holy Spirit thus guides the work of God’s kingdom. And the Spirit may lead the work in a way that differs from what we anticipate. When Paul was traveling with his workmates on a mission trip in Asia Minor, the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching in Asia. They attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to preach there either. In the harbor town of Troas, Paul was given to see a vision of a man from Macedonia saying: “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” The missionary brothers then understood that God was calling them to proclaim the gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10). Like Paul, we today experience the Holy Spirit’s amazing guidance in the work of God’s kingdom, both in our native lands and around the world.

The Holy Spirit and the Congregation

The Holy Spirit gives faith as a gift to an individual, and joins him or her to Christ and the other believers in God’s congregation. Paul writes: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12,13). The congregation of God is therefore comprised of God’s people traveling in one faith, one Spirit, and one love. This is true despite the fact that its members live in different localities around the world, come from different cultures, and speak different languages.

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Jesus' time was a time of visitation for the people of Israel, and we recall that many people referred to Jesus as the King of the Jews. But Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, and calls His followers His sheep. He also speaks about the time of visitation for the Gentiles (non-Jewish people), saying: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [the Jewish nation]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:14–16). Paul proclaimed the gospel among many nationalities, and exhorts: "[Endeavor] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all" (Eph. 4:3–6).

A person on the outside of God's kingdom often sees only the temporal organization, and not the true essence of God's congregation (John 3:3). In the New Testament epistles, Christians are called saints, and God's congregation is the communion of saints—a community of people who have received the Holy Spirit. God's kingdom is not a temporal organization. The Holy Spirit binds it together and guides its operation. But it also calls for an organization to handle the practical arrangements associated with the work, making it possible to operate in society.

A Christian can lose his or her good conscience, and begin to listen more to the voice of his or her own corrupt flesh and human reason instead of the voice of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, the living congregation of God and its teachings begin to feel oppressive. The fallen one begins to view the instructions of the Holy Spirit as mere human opinions. Thus, the branch—the fallen sinner—becomes separated from the vine—the Lord Jesus. This is why God's Word emphasizes the importance of obedience. Obedience to the Holy Spirit means obeying the conscience that the Holy Spirit enlightens, as well as obeying the congregation that the Holy Spirit guides. It also means obeying God's Word. Paul writes that God's congregation "is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

God's Word and the Holy Spirit reveal the boundary between right and wrong. In Christianity, we are accustomed to bringing a matter to the congregation for discussion when confusion or disagreement arises about an important question related to doctrine and life among believers. By praying for the Holy Spirit's instruction and studying the Word of God, we reach a unanimous decision that is "agreeable to the Holy Spirit and us" (Acts 15:28). This happened long ago at the council of the apostles (Acts 15:1–29). Certain Pharisees, who were believers, demanded that Gentiles who became believers be circumcised and required to follow the Law of Moses. This type of teaching confused the congregation in Galatia, among other places. The apostles and elders gathered to discuss this question together with Paul and brothers from Antioch. Peter explained that God accepted the Gentiles, and had "given them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us." He said: "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." The elder James agreed, saying, "to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written... Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God."

The apostles and elders, together with the entire congregation, decided to send letters concerning the decision to the congregations, saying: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." The instructions of the Holy Spirit were given to

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believing Gentiles so that, being from a different culture, their behavior would not offend the consciences of Jewish believers, and break the unity between Christians. (1 Cor. 8:7–13)

When the Holy Spirit guides God's congregation, its instructions are correct and acceptable to God. Sometimes a strong-willed person or group may influence the decision of the congregation in a way that causes confusion and brings sorrow. But God's Spirit makes sure that the matter is corrected and that harmony returns to the congregation.

Guided by the Spirit of Truth

Explaining the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed, Martin Luther writes: "the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith." We are safe when the Holy Spirit guides and cares for us in God's congregation. Today God's congregation is still a battling congregation. God and his kingdom face a powerful enemy: the kingdom of darkness and its spiritual powers, and its leader, the devil. This enemy works in league with our corrupt flesh and the fallen world. Manmade weapons are no help in this battle. Rather, God provides us with spiritual weapons. Our most powerful weapon is the sword of the Spirit: God's Word (Eph. 6:12–17).

The Spirit of God—the Spirit of Truth—battles against the spirit of deception, which "worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). John warns, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). We must assess all doctrines and teachers in the light of God's Holy Word. A main trait of those in the spirit of deception is a false doctrine that is contrary to God's Word, and a way of life that seeks to entice those who travel according to the Spirit of Truth.

The council of the apostles fought against a doctrine that sought to force free grace children to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved. In Corinth, Paul argued against those who claimed there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12,13). John met deceivers who denied the true doctrine of redemption, and said: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). The enemy of souls does not give up. He always seeks to cause grace children to fall away from the true faith, which is in harmony with the Word of God.

John contrasts people led by the spirit of deception with those governed by the Spirit of Truth: "They are of the world: therefore they speak of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:5,6). The spirit of deception divided the congregation and caused a heresy: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us" (1 John 2:19). The Holy Spirit protects those who travel in obedience to His voice. The Spirit protected the believers in the apostles' time, and likewise protects those in the fellowship of God's journeying people yet today.

We work in the Lord's field with the prayer that the Holy Spirit would guide ourselves, as well as every other grace child, on the way to heaven. We pray that the Holy Spirit would give hearing ears and receptive hearts to those outside of God's kingdom. We hope that the Spirit of Truth would help all those who are lost and wandering aimlessly to find their way back into the kingdom of grace. When our

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workdays are over in the fellowship of this kingdom, through the merit of Jesus, we will one day own the inheritance God pledges to His children.

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