

The Holy Spirit

In many central matters the revelation of the Bible goes beyond human understanding. Such a question is also the trinity of God, in whom one person is the Holy Spirit. A special, momentous day of the Holy Spirit, the annual festival "of the shedding of the Holy Spirit," is Pentecost. Even the Old Testament speaks of the Spirit as a functioning God, whose effects were many. But especially the New Testament, and the words of Jesus in particular, clarify the nature and role of the Holy Spirit. In Christian art the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. According to the Catechism, the work of Christ in the world continues as the work of the Holy Spirit in His congregation.

The Spirit of God has operated in believers during all times, even before the first Pentecost. It has always been possible to lose it from one's heart through sin and unbelief, as happened, for example, to David. On the other hand, sins have always been forgiven by the working of the Holy Spirit. The "office" of preaching reconciliation is therefore the office of the Spirit. Also, the writings of the Bible have been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). At the same time, the Holy Spirit opens and explains Scriptures.

God as Creator distributes His goodness to all people, but faith can only be begotten through the working of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of Christ. The Holy Spirit "works faith, when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel" (Augsburg Conf. V). "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John 20: 22,23) According to Jesus the Holy Spirit is also a comforter and teacher and reminds us of "whatsoever I have said unto you." Jesus soberly warns of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit: "And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). Paul characterizes the effects of the Spirit in general: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God...the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:14,16).

The Holy Spirit inspires the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22). The Holy Spirit inspires these in God's children. The influences of flesh and blood are truly often seen in us and bring sorrow. Nevertheless, it cannot be that from the inspiration of the Spirit that one would receive love a second joy, and a third peace. The grace gifts which the Holy Spirit distributes one to one and a second to another mean something else. They are intended for the upbuilding of the congregation. They are abundant, and they work in all times as the Holy Spirit sees necessary. No one has been given all the grace gifts, and not one believer is without any grace gift. Paul enumerates them, for example, as follows: gifts of healing, working of miracles, discerning of spirits, prophesying, divers kinds of tongues and their interpretations (1 Cor 12:14).

When speaking of the Holy Spirit and its effects, we are before immeasurable holy mysteries. Through faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit and on the basis of the revelation of Scripture, we can humbly say that we know in part and we prophesy in part (1 Cor. 13:9). Collectively, we can yet confirm that the work of the Holy Spirit opened to Martin Luther in very many ways. He writes in the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Catechism: "The Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith, even as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins; and at the last, will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ everlasting life."

