

Viljo Juntunen:

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Translated from: PYHÄ HENKI JA PYHÄN HENGEN TYÖ (Presented at annual Conservative Laestadian Speakers' Meeting in Oulu, Finland, Dec. 28, 2012)

Introduction: The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God and Christ

God works in creation and in the world of mankind as three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their three modes of work are creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Triune God works to save sin-fallen mankind.

The power and guidance of God's spirit is mentioned already in the Old Testament. According to the story of creation, "And 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." Under 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?" (Isaiah 63: 10, 11). The prophets also foretold the pouring of the spirit in the last times (Isaiah 44: 3).

The spirit of God kept alive the wait for the coming of the Messiah. At the time of Jesus's 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 prophets 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 had promised 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 1948, 44).

The Holy Spirit is the key to understanding 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 the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1: 20–21). The spirit opens the Word of God and Christ. Thus praying, dear brothers, we gather at this speakers' meeting.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of a child

Every human being is born as an heir of the corruptive fall into sin, but also as a partaker of the atonement work of Christ (1 John 2: 2). We have begun our journey in the secure faith of a child, led by the Holy Spirit, and under the grace covenant of baptism. Surrounded by a believing family and in the care of the Holy Spirit, many have been preserved as children of God.

Jesus's own preach repentance and remission of sins to those who have lost their right to be a child and who have been awakened by God (Luke 24: 47). Peter preached the gospel in Jesus's name to the centurion Cornelius and his family. Thereafter the Holy Spirit fell upon the listeners and gave to 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).

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 child has the liberty of a child (2 Cor. 3: 17). We can trustingly approach the Father also in our prayers, and the Father hears us.

Children of God are children in God's family—brothers and sisters—joined by the love effected by the same Spirit. The Spirit testifies that we are also 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 man is under the judgment of the Law of Moses. A person living in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is under the law of the Spirit through the merit of Christ. "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 which are opposite to the works of someone living in 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 when someone without grace receives the grace to return (Acts 16: 33–34).

Jesus's parable about the vine and its branches (John 15: 1–10) describes how God through his Spirit takes care of us in his congregation: "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 Word cleanses our corrupt flesh from bad fruit so that we will remain as living branches in Christ Jesus: "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.

The first and greatest fruit of the Spirit is love. It is directed toward the Lord Jesus and other believers. It receives its power from the love of God: “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 everyone’s sake.

The fruits of the Spirit also include “self-control”—a desire to battle against the enticements of sin. Even someone who is a partaker of the gift of the Holy Spirit is prone to sin on the part of his flesh. 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 itself, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to confess our sins and believe in the forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Spirit and grace gifts

God has created us as different persons and has given us different capabilities and gifts which serve our own needs and those of our neighbors. Because of his corrupt flesh, man often uses these selfishly and for his own glory. The Holy Spirit uses these capabilities and gifts for the construction of the congregation. The Spirit awakens grace gifts and calls us to serve.

Everyone has a grace gift effected by the Spirit. “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 organ has its own task in the body; likewise, believers 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; 1 Cor. 13: 1–13).

The Holy Spirit and the office of ministry

Each and every Christian is a priest of the Holy Spirit, who can instruct and encourage with the Word of God and act as a messenger of the gospel in his own surroundings. “But 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 Peter 2: 9). This general priesthood belongs to each and every believer regardless of age or gender.

The congregation sees the necessity 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 task of a minister. Often this takes place with prayers and laying on of hands. Paul warns Timothy against neglecting the grace gift which was given to him when the elders laid their hands upon him (1 Tim. 4: 14).

In Old Testament times the office of ministry was held by prophets. "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 Peter 1: 10–12).

The office of ministry 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 the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in his home town, Nazareth:

"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, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Having read this, he began to speak: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4: 16–21).

Anointment by the "Spirit of the Lord" to the task of the Messiah had just taken place at the River Jordan, where John had baptized Jesus (Mark 1: 9–11). The heavens opened and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove. A voice was heard from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Anointed 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).

As the resurrected Lord, Jesus sent his disciples to preach the forgiveness of sins and anointed them to this task with the Holy Spirit: "As my Father hath sent me, even so I send you... Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20: 19–23). On Pentecost all the disciples were garbed with the power of the Holy Spirit from on high. Many who had come to the Pentecost festivity believed and departed to proclaim the gospel to their home areas in many languages.

The Holy Spirit gives the words and the courage to do the work of the gospel. The portion of a minister of the Word is not always easy. At times preaching feels overwhelmingly difficult. Paul says he arrived in Corinth "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." He wanted to know only about the crucified Christ. "And 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). Jesus promises that even in the midst of persecution the Holy

Spirit will give the power to confess one's faith: "But 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." (Math. 10: 19–20). The sowers of the Word can also rejoice over the success of the work (1 Thess. 1: 2–6).

The work of the kingdom of God is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit may guide the work in a way that differs from what we have planned. When Paul was traveling with his workmates on a mission trip in Asia Minor, the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching the Word in Asia. They attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow that, either. In the harbor town of Troas Paul saw a vision in which a man from Macedonia asked: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Then the brothers understood that God had called them to proclaim the gospel there (Acts 16: 6–10). Yet today we experience this type of amazing guidance by the Holy Spirit in the work of the kingdom of God, both in our own country and in different parts of the world.

The Holy Spirit and the congregation

The Holy Spirit gives a person faith as a gift and joins him to Christ and other believers—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, even though its members live in different localities, on different sides of the world, in different cultures, and speak different languages. Jesus's time was a time of visitation for the people of Israel. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd and his followers, his sheep. He also refers to the coming time of visitation for the Gentiles: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: 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, who proclaimed the gospel among many nationalities, exhorts: "Endeavoring 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).

In the epistles of the New Testament, Christians are called "saints." The congregation is the communion of saints, a community of people who have received the Holy Spirit. It is not a temporal organization, as it is the Holy Spirit that binds it together and guides its operation. Practical arrangements associated with the work of the kingdom of God often necessitate an organization which makes it possible to do the work in society. An outsider easily sees only the temporal organization, not the true essence of the kingdom of God (John 3: 3).

A Christian can lose his good conscience and begin to listen more to the voice of his own reason and corrupt flesh than the voice of the Holy Spirit. Then the living congregation of God and its teachings begin to feel constrictive. The instructions of the Holy Spirit are experienced as mere human opinions.

The branch is becoming separated from the vine, the Lord Jesus. This is why the Word of God emphasizes the importance of obedience. Obedience to the Holy Spirit means obedience to the conscience that is enlightened by the Holy Spirit and obedience to the congregation guided by the Holy Spirit. At the same time it means obedience to the Word of God. Paul wrote a letter to Timothy so that he would know how one should dwell in the house of God, “which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3: 15).

In our Christianity we are accustomed to “asking the congregation” if confusion or disagreement about an important question related to doctrine and life arises among Christians. By praying for instruction of the Holy Spirit and studying the Word of God, a unanimous decision is reached that is “agreeable to the Holy Spirit and us.” The Word of God and the Holy Spirit have then drawn a boundary between right and wrong.

This happened long ago at the council of the apostles (Acts 15: 1–29). Certain Pharisees who had become believers demanded that Gentiles who became believers had to be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses. This type of teaching had confused the congregation in Galatia, among other places. The apostles and elders gathered to deal with this question together with Paul and brothers from Antioch. Peter explained that God had accepted the Gentiles and had “given them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us.” He said: “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” The elder James agreed and said: “And 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: “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... (= marriage between relatives, forbidden in the OT).” The latter instructions of the Holy Spirit were given to believing Gentiles so that—being from a different culture—they would not offend the consciences of Jewish believers with their behavior (1 Cor. 8: 7–13) and thereby break the unity between Christians.

When the Holy Spirit guides God’s congregation, the instructions it gives 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 to many. God’s Spirit makes sure the matter is corrected and unanimity returns to the congregation.

Guided by the Spirit of Truth

Luther writes in his explanation of the 3rd article of the creed: “...the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith...” It is safe to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the care of God’s congregation. Today God’s congregation is still a battling congregation. God and his kingdom have a powerful enemy, the kingdom of darkness, its spiritual powers, and its leader, the Devil. This enemy is united with our corrupt flesh and the fallen

world. Carnal weapons are of no avail in this battle. God has given us spiritual weapons, the most important being the sword of the Spirit—God’s Word (Eph. 6: 12–17).

Correspondingly, the Spirit of God—the Spirit of Truth—is opposed by 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).

All doctrines and teachers must be examined in the light of God’s Holy Word, as we are taught in the confession of our Lutheran church. Characteristic of those in the spirit of deception is a false doctrine that goes against the Word of God and a way of life that seeks to entice those traveling in obedience 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 as a prerequisite for being saved. Paul fought in Corinth against those who claimed there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15: 12, 13). John met deceivers who denied the true doctrine about Christ: “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 the soul has not given up; he continuously seeks to cause grace children to fall away from faith that is accordant with the Word of God.

The characteristics summarized in John’s first epistle describe the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of deception: “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 schism: “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). Those who traveled in obedience to the Spirit were protected then and are protected also today in the fellowship of God’s journeying people.

Dear brothers. We are doing this work in the Lord’s field with the prayer that the Holy Spirit would guide us and each and every grace child on the way to Heaven and would give those on the outside hearing ears and a receptive heart. It is our hope that the Spirit of Truth would help those who are lost and aimlessly wandering back into the kingdom of grace. In the fellowship of this kingdom, through the merit of Jesus, when our workdays are over we will one day own the inheritance promised to His children.