



Peninsula City Church

The Holy Spirit

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Michael Podhaczky

25th February 2018 the AM Service

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The Person of the Holy Spirit

Q. What would you say to someone regarding the Person of the Spirit?

An Introduction

A major reason for briefly discussing this question is that, without proper understanding regarding God the Holy Spirit, one could end in error. If one has a wrong understanding of the Holy Spirit, then it could affect one's knowledge of the Father and the Son. There has been some wrong teaching on the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church, and it continues today.

Before looking at the topic of the Holy Spirit, firstly it needs to be said that,

“We believe in one God.”¹

This is the opening statement of what is known as the Nicene Creed (or statements of faith from the first council in 325 and the second council in 451AD). That is, we are monotheistic in our faith, i.e. the belief in one God.² This is in line with Deuteronomy 6:4 which proclaims, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4 ESV). However, the Father is called God (Phil 1:2); the Son is called God Titus 2:13; and the Holy Spirit is also called God (Acts 5:3-5). But there are not three gods, but only One God. A word was created to express this truth of three divine persons within the Godhead, i.e. the word Trinity.

Having said this, today we will review the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is completely equal, eternal, separate and the third divine Person of the Triune God, but not third in rank.³ This should give confidence that He knows the divine purposes. He is not merely a force, power or substance that is unable to help us; rather He is as much a Person with both divine and personal attributes within the Trinity as the Father and the Son. So, He can meaningfully make known and interpret God's purpose and will for anyone to know them. Since He is a divine Person with personality, He can relate to somebody in a personal way. Be assured that He is in complete unity with the Father and the Son. As the Statement of belief of the Council of Constantinople in 381 stated,

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”⁴

1. What's it all about?

Q. How would you explain the Person of the Holy Spirit to a new Christ-follower?

So, having introduced this topic, we will consider the part of the above creed that says,

‘We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord... who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.’

In other words, He is God as the Father and the Son is God, but He is not the Father and the Son. He is distinct from the Father and the Son as God and exists within unity in the Trinity of three Persons.⁵ So, there is only one God, in complete unity as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and has always existed in this way.

¹ “Nicene Creed.” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/nicene.htm> (22nd February 2018).

² “From Greek monos, ‘one,’ and theos, ‘God,’ i.e. belief in one God.” McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 177.

³ Elowsky, Joel C. *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*. Ancient Christian Doctrines Series. Vol. 4. (, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 237.

⁴ Creed of the Council of Constantinople, 381.” <http://www.fourthcentury.com/constantinople-381-creed-english/> (19th February 2018).

⁵ Hoeksema, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), 131.

But it needs to be said that to define the Holy Spirit is quite a challenging undertaking. In 1946 the teaching of the Holy Spirit was called “the last unexplored theological frontier.”⁶ However, since then there has been quite a bit research done and a lot has been written on the topic. For example, there has been the rise of the Pentecostal movement and even the Orthodox churches have been open to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Yet, in any study, it needs to be remembered that,

“Any discussion of the Spirit is fraught with the difficulty of about something or someone who defies definition and who purposely averts attention from Himself towards someone else. So it is with the Spirit... Rather than drawing attention to Himself, the Spirit has always pointed us to Christ and His works, which brings glory to the Father. The reluctance of to speak about the Spirit reflects the relative silence of Scripture itself – relative in comparison to Scripture’s revelation of the Father and the Son.”⁸

He is God that is why He is called Lord in He Creed. He is a distinct Person within the Trinity, who is uncreated, but eternal. He is equal in His divinity with the Father and the Son. This is why Jesus could say,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19 ESV).

2. What does this all mean?

Q. What is the teaching of the person of the Holy Spirit all about?

So, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in authority, even if they have different roles to fulfil. The main role of the Holy Spirit is the Inspirer, Giver and Revealer / Illuminator of truth.⁹ This is the truth of the Father and the Son and the truth in the Scriptures. The next part of the Creed deals with His role as’

“The giver of life, who proceeds from the Father... (who is to be) worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

However, this is not done in isolation or some vacuum. The Holy Spirit fulfils His role in unity with the Father and Son, and within the church (body of Christ). On this unity or interdependent relationship with the church, it has been said that,

“For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and every kind of grace... *That is*, the Spirit and the Church go hand in hand.”¹⁰

This idea of the Holy Spirit being the Inspirer, Giver and Revealer / Illuminator can be seen in passages like the following,

a. Inspirer:

¹⁵ “And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God (inspired) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:15-17 ESV).

⁶ Berdyaev, Nicolas. *Spirit and Reality*. (trans.by). George Reavey. (London: G. Bles, 1946), 22.

⁷ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xv.

⁸ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xiv.

⁹ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xiv.

¹⁰ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xvii. The italics are mine to make sense of the quote.

Also see ¹⁵ “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:15-16 ESV).

b. Giver:

For example the giver of life: ⁵ “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit... The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:5-6,8 ESV).

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18 ESV).

¹⁶ “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:16 ESV).

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet 4:10 ESV).

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed...” (1 Cor 12:1 ESV).

c. Revealer / Illuminator:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach (reveal to) you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26 ESV).

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21 ESV).

¹⁷ “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened (illuminated), that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:17-18 ESV).

“And to bring to light (illuminate) for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph 3:9 ESV).

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened (illuminated), who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit” (Heb 6:4 ESV).

However, what needs to be remembered is that in the Holy Spirit’s role of inspiring, giving and revealing/illuminating He is not third in rank within the Trinity. He is God in every sense of what that means, but He is not the Father or the Son. It has been pointed out that,

“The ancient church often spoke of *taxis*, or ordering, when speaking about God and His interaction in the world with us; *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *to/in* the Spirit. But they also spoke of human interaction and doxology (a procedure of praise to God) back to God in similar terms with the *taxis* reversed: *from/in* the Spirit, *through* the Son *to* the Father.

Christ is at the centre of pneumatological theology; the Father is its goal; the Spirit is the means. Without the Spirit, there can be no human response back to God.”¹¹

Therefore, we should not make too much of the ordering of God.

I would like to look at one last thing that the Holy Spirit does before closing. This is what has been called sanctification. It is the Holy Spirit’s role to guide us in our growth in holiness. It has been said that,

“He seeks to make us as holy as He is.”¹²

The Holy Spirit helps us to grow in holiness and spirituality to become Christ-like in our life. The people as the church are the Holy Spirit’s temple. However, we all know that we are continuously sinning. That is why the Holy Spirit convicts us to repent constantly because there is the cleansing of His temple where He lives.

⁸ “And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:8-11 ESV).

¹⁶ “Do you not know that you (plural) are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you (plural)? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you (plural) are that temple” (1 Cor 3:17 ESV).

“Or do you not know that your bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (1 Cor 6:19 ESV).

Therefore, the Holy Spirit will do what He needs to make us as holy as He is through His sanctifying work.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. What would you say to someone regarding the Person of the Spirit?

So a major reason for discussing this question is that, without proper understanding concerning God the person of Holy Spirit, one could end in error. If one has a wrong understanding of the Holy Spirit, then it could affect one’s knowledge of the Father and the Son. Consequently, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit is God and should be treated as such. It has been said that,

“The early Christians approached their teaching about the Holy Spirit more cautiously and humbly than subsequent ages have done at times.”¹³

Remember that, any discussion of the Spirit is fraught with the difficulty about something or someone who defies definition and who purposely averts attention from Himself towards someone else. Rather than drawing attention to Himself, the Spirit has always pointed us to Christ and His works, which brings glory to the Father.

So, what is your perspective on the Holy Spirit? Well, we need to believe in one God. However, we also need to believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in authority, even if they have different roles

¹¹ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xx. The italics are his.

¹² Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xx-xxi.

¹³ Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xxxiii.

to fulfil. The main role of the Holy Spirit is the Inspirer, Giver and Revealer / Illuminator of truth. This is the truth of the Father and the Son and the truth in the Scriptures.

Where the church is, there is the Holy Spirit; and where the Holy Spirit, there is the church. That is, the Holy Spirit and the Church go hand in hand. The church is the place where He has made His temple, and He lives there permanently. He constantly seeks to make us (His church) as holy as He is. The Holy Spirit daily helps us to grow in holiness and spirituality to become Christ-like in our life.

This is all done from relationship. The Holy Spirit is not removed from us in some distant place of the universe. Rather He is always living with us as His temple. This should bring us great assurance, comfort and peace. Remember that, even Jesus from His incarnation until He went back to the Father relied on the Holy Spirit, but this is a topic for next time.

Stop and pause in His presence for a moment and think this over...