

The Spotlight Spirit

John 16: 4-15

**First Presbyterian Church
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Gerrit Scott Dawson**

Have you ever wondered why you believe in God? What makes you feel, deep in your heart, that God is there, that he loves you, that he has made you his child? Why, in the midst of a world of doubt do you, of all people, know that Jesus is Lord? What is the source of the comfort you feel even during the worst times?

The answer from the Scriptures to all these questions is the Holy Spirit. In our study of the Golden Gospel, these words of Jesus on the last night of his life, we have concentrated on the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus told us that he and his Father are so close that they can be said to dwell in one another. Jesus said or did nothing that was not in perfect agreement with his Father. We saw that God lives as an eternal relationship of love.

Into today's lesson, Jesus speaks to his disciples of the Holy Spirit. There is a third divine person. God is Triune. Within the one God are three persons, each fully God, living in an eternal life of love and oneness. But in many ways, the Spirit seems to be the silent partner. Who is the Holy Spirit? What does he do? Why is so little said about the Spirit? Let's look at five great things to know about God the Holy Spirit.

1) The Spirit lights up Jesus. The Holy Spirit is always pointing the attention away from himself and onto the other two persons of the Trinity. The Spirit is humble, quiet, and invisible. His delight is making the Son and the Father shine in their glory.

For the Spirit's work is to shine his light upon Jesus Christ. He makes Jesus known. Jesus said of the Spirit, "He will not speak on his own authority; but whatever he hears, he will speak.... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16: 13-14).

If you walk down North Blvd on a fall night, after the sun has set, you will see our church tower lit up. It's beautiful against the night sky. When I see the tower illuminated, I give thanks that God has placed us here and given us this beautiful sanctuary in which to worship. I look at the tower, not at the spotlights

that light up the tower. Someone passing by doesn't think, "Wow, what great light bulbs!" No, they say, "What a beautiful church." The purpose of the lights is to shine attention on the tower, not themselves. That's how it is with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit points us toward Jesus.¹

The job of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Jesus. He brings to mind all the things that Jesus said and did. The Spirit is the holy Reminder, the great Rembrancer. The Spirit enabled the apostles to recall the words and deeds of Jesus so they could be written down as the words of Scripture. So all generations to come could know who Jesus is and what he did while he was among us. Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He leads us into understanding. While Jesus was with them, the disciples struggled to grasp who he is. But when the Spirit came to them, they realized and could express that this man Jesus is indeed the very Son of God. The Spirit illuminates Jesus and reveals him to the world.

2. The Spirit lights up our hearts. Once the light is shining on Jesus, though, it does not necessarily mean that we personally know who he is. We need the Holy Spirit to create within us the capacity to see that the man Jesus is our Savior, the very Son of the Father, the Lamb of God and Lord of all. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." Our unaided minds cannot apprehend how this working class man from remote Nazareth who lived two thousand years ago could actually mean something to us today. We do not naturally possess the ability to translate looking at him into faith. The Spirit has to make the connection within us.

When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus responded, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16: 17). God can only be known if he chooses to reveal himself. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see who God is in Jesus Christ.

Why do we believe? Because God the Holy Spirit has enabled us to see and to accept the truth. Why doesn't everyone believe? That's a great question which could take dozens of sermons just to consider. Our purpose today is different, but I'd like just to say that God does not force himself upon us. He does not overwhelm us but asks for our cooperation. And, we may know that God is working his purposes out. He is working, wooing, struggling with this world he has made. His timing in one person may be different than in another. Before us today, though, is a consideration from the side of those who realize how, by

amazing grace, we have come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is not achievement of ours, but a precious gift—a gift, by the way, that we are sent to share with the world.

So the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us and enables us to believe. That in itself is wonderful. But there is much more.

3. The Spirit joins us to Jesus. God came to us in Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins. He took on flesh and blood that as our brother he might make us sons and daughters of his Father. He lived the life of obedience and love for God that is required of all of us, but which we have failed to do. He died the death for the sins of all of us, which we deserved. Jesus did this as the new Adam, as the beginning of a new humanity, a humanity once again aligned with God and his will for us. Jesus remade us because, as a man, as one of us, from within our miserable frailty, he lived perfect love for God and humanity.

When we come to saving faith in Jesus, the perfect record of Jesus gets credited to us. We get his righteousness and holiness. We get joined to Jesus and all his benefits. We get his perfect sacrifice for sin and his resurrection victory over death.

This union with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. He unites us to Jesus. We don't know how this great mystery works, but it does. The Spirit enables hardened sinners like you and me to see who Jesus is and all he has done for us. He enables us to believe, and then he unites us to Christ, giving us constantly all the benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. By the Holy Spirit, we become united to Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the great bond, the glue. He takes what is of Jesus, his obedient life and sacrificial death, his words of truth and his healing power, and he binds all of that to us. The change in a life so bonded has been called "the birth from above" (Jn. 3) or the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3). It is the coming of new life, new creation and it is all the work of the Spirit.

4. The Spirit lives in us. When we come to faith in Christ, getting joined to him, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. He makes us a new creation in Jesus. God's Holy Spirit actually deigns to dwell within us. Because we have been given the holiness of Christ, because we are new creatures, the Holy Spirit can endure living within our spirit. Paul wrote to the Romans that "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us' (5: 5). Jesus

said to his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to dwell within them, and would be with them forever. And in Galatians we read that “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” (4: 6).

This is way more than the divine spark within. Or the vague feeling of God’s presence that people may describe as spiritual experience. This is God Almighty dwelling within the hearts of his people. The Holy Spirit adopts us as God’s own sons. By the Spirit we cry out, “Abba, Father!” to God. The Holy Spirit testifies within us, gives us an inner assurance, that we are God’s children. He urges us to cry out to our Father in prayer, in praise and need. This is far more than some generic sense in which every person is a child of God. We become specifically brothers of Jesus, adopted into his sonship.

5. The Holy Spirit is the power of Christ in us. He expresses this power of Christ’s eternal life from within us in many ways. One is assurance that we are saved and belong to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the *guarantee* within us of all that is to come. This feeling of the Spirit’s presence is a taste of heaven. It is a preview of what life will be like in our Father’s house. Another is the way the Spirit works to reproduce the life of Jesus through us. The Spirit grows fruit within us, the fruit that tastes like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and gentleness. And, the Spirit gives us power to overcome the sinful nature and live in alignment with God. The Holy Spirit gives us words to say when we tell others about Jesus, and he takes our halting efforts at love and service and makes them effective in the world. He illumines the words of Scripture when we read them. He prays for us and in us. He works to make us more and more like our brother and savior Jesus Christ. Is it any wonder we call him the Blessed Holy Spirit? What a marvelous God who would come to dwell in hearts like ours.

Now, are you wondering, “If all this is true, why I experience so little of it? Is the Holy Spirit just for preachers and super Christians? Is he just for people willing to foam at the mouth and flop around in praise?”

To answer, I’d like to turn to a great fountainhead of theological insight. Yes, I’m talking about *Gilligan’s Island*! I shudder to calculate how many hours of my youth were wasted watching this show about the “seven stranded castaways” on an uncharted Pacific island. In one episode, an underwater phone cable washed up on the island within a storm. The castaways realized that if they could tap into the cable, they could reach the mainland and get help. The cable connected them to civilization.

So they spliced into the line. First Gilligan got a man and a woman who were necking. The man took the phone off the hook and never bothered to see who was there. Then, Ginger, the movie star, tapped into a conversation between a man and a woman who were fighting over, you guessed it, the man's other girlfriend. They got no help. Next, Gilligan got a movie theatre. All he could get from the voice was show times. Finally, Gilligan got an operator, but she kept asking him to deposit a dime. And when she finally heard his story, she cut him off, dismissing him as a nut case.

Here is a parable! God has spliced into human life in Jesus Christ. He doesn't want to be remote, removed from us in heaven. He has come to enter the conversation, and tell us that we may come to know him. The Spirit has come to dwell within Christians and wants to enter the conversations of your life. He wants to give you his power and lead you into greater intimacy with God the Father and union with Jesus Christ. He splices into our lives with the news. But he finds us unavailable. We're pursuing our desire. And they take all our time. We're in the middle of arguments we won't drop. The gall becomes our food. Or we see life solely in terms of our business. I can give you the numbers and the show times, but I don't know the first thing about getting off the island. Or, if we ever do finally hear the story and hear the news, we are like the operator. First we want to talk about how much it's going to cost. Then, we just decide that God is a nut case and we'll go back to business as usual. God, you just stay on that remote island in heaven and leave me alone. I told you God had nothing to do with real life and no power to affect me.

The Holy Spirit is humble and gentle. Of course he could blow us away with his power. But that is not God's way. He desires our cooperation. He waits for us. He will not force us.

Jesus said the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Lk. 11:13). We have to ask. Yes, faith is a gift. Yes, seeing God in Jesus is a work of the Spirit. But God also requires us. We have to ask. We have to agree. We have to say Yes, Holy Spirit work in me. Enflame my heart. Open my eyes. Burn out my sin. Empower me to live for you. All is yours. I cannot live without you. Cry out within me for the Father! Show me the things of Jesus. Make me your child. Confirm my adoption. Seal my heart. Grow your fruit through me.

For some today, this talk of the Holy Spirit seems very natural. It confirms what you feel in your heart and have known in your experience. For others, this may seem like information that is foreign to us. The Spirit is on the outside,

external. You do not know the peace that passes understanding. You do not know the marvelous forgiveness of sins. You do not know the presence in the dark of the night that assures you that you are not alone. You do not have assurance of your eternal life to come.

Perhaps you have never invited the Spirit to come within you and do his work. Perhaps today it is time to answer the knock on the door and let God come in. Simply to release control of your life as you say, “Lord Jesus Christ, savior of sinners, send your Holy Spirit to join my heart to yours.”

Or perhaps it is time to yield to Jesus an area of your life which you have been holding onto. God’s power in your life has been drained by your holding out on him. You’ve been hiding something, clinging to something. Today he calls you to say, “Lord Jesus, I release this to you. You be in control. I yield. Come with fresh power in my life. Make me more like you.”

Jesus taught his disciples “Seek and you will find. Ask and it shall be given. If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?” (Lk. 11). Oh this day let us ask, according to his will. Let us ask for the Triune God to be in us all he wants to be in us, our loving Father, the saving Son, and the gentle, empowering, enlightening, comforting, blessed Holy Spirit. Let us ask today!

¹ Adapted from J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*