

The Apostles' Creed

I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Selected Texts

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October 24, 2004

I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means to believe in the Holy Spirit. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Today we begin the third and final section in the *Apostles' Creed*. In this section we look at the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

You may remember that I told you that the *Apostles' Creed* is essentially Trinitarian. There are three major sections, each dealing with one of the three persons of the Trinity.

The first section deals with the person and work of the Father, the second section with the person and work of the Son, and the third section with the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson

Today I want to look briefly at the statement that says: “*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*”

I would like to examine this statement by exploring:

1. The Person of the Holy Spirit, and
2. The Work of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Person of the Holy Spirit

First, let's look at the person of the Holy Spirit.

There are three topics I would like to address with respect to the person of the Holy Spirit:

1. The Personality of the Holy Spirit,
2. The Relation of the Holy Spirit to the Other Persons in the Trinity, and
3. The Deity of the Holy Spirit.

A. *The Personality of the Holy Spirit*

First, let's discuss the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Although many have questioned the *deity* of the Holy Spirit, it is interesting to note that far more questions have been raised about the *personality* of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout history many sects have denied that the Holy Spirit is a person. Most of these sects believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person. They say that the Holy Spirit is merely a power or the influence of God.

I remember as a young Christian being confronted by this issue. One of my “uncles”—a close friend of my parents—learned that I had become a Christian. The next time he visited our home

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he spent a considerable amount of time trying to convince me that the Holy Spirit was merely a power or the influence of God. It was difficult for me to respond well because I was so young in the faith.

How would you respond to someone who urged you to believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person but is merely a power?

Well, I was forced to examine what the Scriptures teach about the person of the Holy Spirit. What do the Scriptures teach?

Scripture is quite clear that the Holy Spirit is a person. For one thing, *he is clearly designated as a person*. John 14:26 says: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, *whom* the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (cf. also John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7-15; Romans 8:26).

Moreover, *personal characteristics are ascribed to the Holy Spirit*. He has *intelligence*: “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26; cf. also John 14:26; Romans 8:16).

He has *emotions*: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30; cf. also Isaiah 63:10).

And he has a *will*: “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:6-7; cf. also 1 Corinthians 12:11).

Moreover, the Holy Spirit *performs acts* proper to personality, such as speaking, searching, testifying, commanding, revealing, striving, and making intercession (cf. Genesis 1:2; 6:3; Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 13:2; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11).

So, let us not make the mistake of referring to the Holy Spirit as “it,” or as merely a power, or the influence of God. The Holy Spirit is a person, and we should refer to the Holy Spirit as “he.”

B. The Relation of the Holy Spirit to the Other Persons in the Trinity

Next, let’s discuss the relation of the Holy Spirit to the other persons in the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is commonly designated as the “third person of the Trinity.” As such, he is equal in essence and power with the Father and the Son.

Question 6 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” The answer given is: “There are three persons in the Godhead: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”¹

It is important to note that each person of the Godhead has a different function. The Holy Spirit has a different function than the Father and the Son. In terms of salvation, for example, the Father elects a people for himself (Romans 8:28-30), the Son purchases the elect with his blood (Romans 5:8-9), and the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the elect.

Titus 3:5 says: “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

C. The Deity of the Holy Spirit

And third, let’s discuss the deity of the Holy Spirit.

¹Smith, M. H. (1996, c1990). *Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession Standards*. Index created by Christian Classics Foundation.; Published in electronic form by Christian Classics Foundation, 1996. (electronic ed.). Greenville SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press.

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That the Holy Spirit is God can be proved in the following way. *First, divine names are given to him.* We read in Acts 5:3-4: “Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God’” (cf. also 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16). Peter refers to the Holy Spirit as God.

Second, divine perfections are ascribed to him. For example, the Holy Spirit is said to be *omnipresent*. Psalm 139:7-10 says: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

The Holy Spirit is also said to be *omniscient* (Isaiah 40:13, 14), *omnipotent* (1 Corinthians 12:11), and *eternal* (Hebrews 9:14).

Third, divine works are performed by him. I will spend a little more time shortly on the works of the Holy Spirit, but here I simply want to note that certain divine works are attributed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to be involved in *creation*. Genesis 1:2 says: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

The Holy Spirit *regenerates* unbelievers. John 3:5-6 says: “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.’”

The Holy Spirit is involved in the *resurrection of the dead*. Romans 8:11 says: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

And finally, divine honor is paid to him. We see this, for example, in the passage commonly known as the “Great Commission” passage where the Holy Spirit is given the same status as the Father and the Son. Matthew 28:19 says: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (cf. also Romans 9:1; 2 Corinthians 13:13).

So, I hope that you see from all these texts that the Holy Spirit is a person.

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit

Now let us see what that Bible has to say secondly about the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is involved in all the work of the Triune God. Thus, as I have suggested, the Holy Spirit was active in the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:2), the salvation of believers (John 3:5-6), the resurrection of the dead (Romans 8:11), and more. All that the other members of the Godhead do the Holy Spirit does too.

But the primary work of the Holy Spirit is stated in John 16:13-14. Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit, and he says, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. *He will bring glory to me* by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” The work of the Holy Spirit primarily is to glorify Christ. Properly understood, all the other works of the Holy Spirit are under this overarching purpose.

But exactly how does the Holy Spirit glorify Christ? He does so in four areas:

1. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Teaching about Christ,
2. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Drawing People to Christ,

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3. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Reproducing Christ's Character in Believers, and
4. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Directing Christians to Serve.

A. *The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Teaching about Christ*

First, notice that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by teaching about Christ.

The Holy Spirit was teaching about Christ in the Old Testament. But the work did not stop there.

The New Testament records what Christ did and explains its meaning. This was to have such bearing on the work of the disciples that it is emphasized in Christ's final conversations with them. He says in John 15:26, "When the Counselor comes, . . . he will testify about me." And in John 16:12-13, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

The New Testament is the record of the Holy Spirit glorifying Christ by teaching about Christ.

B. *The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Drawing People to Christ*

Second, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by drawing people to Christ.

After Jesus said that he would send the Holy Spirit to the disciples to be with them forever, he added in John 14:17 regarding the Spirit of truth: "The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him."

By *the world* John means the world of men and women who are separate from Christ. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in leading people to Christ, no one can either see, know or receive spiritual things. They cannot *see* because they are spiritually blind. As Jesus said in John 3:3, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

They cannot *know* because the things of the Spirit “are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

They cannot *receive* the Holy Spirit or Christ because, as Jesus said in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

So what happens? The Holy Spirit opens blind eyes so that the unregenerate may see the truth, unfogs their minds so that they may understand what they see, and then gently woos their wills until they come to place their faith in the Savior. Without this work there would not be even a single Christian in the world. By means of this work the Holy Spirit saves us and glorifies Christ.

C. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Reproducing Christ's Character in Believers

Third, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by reproducing Christ's character in believers.

The Holy Spirit does this in three ways. *First, the Holy Spirit reproduces Christ's character in believers by leading Christians to greater victory over themselves and their sin.* Romans 8:9 says, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to gain victory over sin.

Ludwig Nommensen, a pioneer missionary to the Batak people of Indonesia, spent two years living with them and studying their traditions.

At the end of that time, the chief asked him if the Christian faith differed from the Batak traditions.

“We, too, have laws that say we must not steal, nor take our neighbor's wife, nor bear false witness,” the chief said.

The missionary answered, “My Master gives the power to keep his laws.”

The chief was startled. “Can you teach my people that?”

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“God can give them that power if they ask for it and listen to his word.”

So for six months Nommensen taught the Batak about the power of God.

At the end of that time the chief said, “Stay, your law is better than ours. Ours tells us what we ought to do. But your God says, ‘Come, I will walk with you and give you strength to do the good thing.’”

Second, the Holy Spirit reproduces Christ’s character in believers by interceding for Christians and teaching them to pray. Romans 8:26-27 says: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

And third, the Holy Spirit reproduces Christ’s character in believers by revealing God’s will for their lives and enabling them to walk in it. Psalm 143:10 says: “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” Jesus said in John 16:13, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

D. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ by Directing Christians to Serve

And finally, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by directing Christians to serve.

The Holy Spirit calls Christians into various tasks and then equips and sustains them in that task.

A great example of this is seen in Acts 13:2-4: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by

the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.” The Holy Spirit calls men and women into specific vocations and goes with them as they do it.

Of course, he does not always call in precisely the same way. That is probably why we are not told how the disciples at Antioch came to know that the Holy Spirit had designated Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. The point is simply that the Holy Spirit does call people to service, and our task is to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading in our lives.

So, the role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ.

Conclusion

When you say, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit,*” what are you affirming?

First, you are affirming that the Holy Spirit is a person. You believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Moreover, you are denying that the Holy Spirit is merely a power or an influence.

And second, you are affirming the work of the Holy Spirit. The way you affirm the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ in your life. So, let me ask you:

- Are you learning about Christ? You may not be a Christian, but you are learning about Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit operative in your life.
- Are you being drawn to Christ? If you are placing your trust in Christ, then the Holy Spirit is operative in your life.
- Are you becoming more and more like Christ? If so, it is because the Holy Spirit is operative in your life.
- Are you serving Christ? If so, it is because the Holy Spirit is at work, glorifying Christ in you.

I pray that every one of us here today will be able to affirm, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*” Amen.

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