

Introduction

For more than a year now, we have heard the phrase "essential workers." These are workers that officials believe must continue to do their jobs even when many others are told they must stay home. From the standpoint of most governors throughout the United States, essential workers typically include those employed in health care, food service, and public transportation. Whatever you or I may think about how government officials have handled this situation, the advent of covid-19 has caused many to think hard about WHO is really essential and WHAT is really essential. While the authorities are supposedly thinking about who or what is essential in a limited time frame, it seems that in the long run they overlooked and classified as "non-essential" workers who are just as important as anyone else.

When Paul describes the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and how God has arranged the members in the body, he declares that the parts of the body which SEEM to be less important are actually indispensable. God's design is that ALL the members have the SAME care for one another.

Now, when we consider the Triune God, we may find ourselves thinking much about God the Father and God the Son as essential in God's work among his creatures. And they are! However, I am afraid that many Christians have a tendency to relegate the significance of God the Holy Spirit to a level of lesser significance in the Godhead. But we are reminded, as we pay careful attention to Revelation 1:4, that the Holy Spirit is every bit as essential to who God is as are the Father and the Son. That he is called the third person of the Trinity is not to diminish his deity or his place in relation to the Father and the Son or His role in God's wonderful works!

[Read Text and Pray]

The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John is a prophetic and apocalyptic epistle to seven churches in Asia. After John provides an introductory paragraph, he begins with a salutary greeting characteristic of most of the other New Testament letters. He greets those for whom this letter is written with two focal aspects of God's salvation blessings—grace and peace. By God's grace are we saved and kept, and grace will lead us home. This grace provides believers peace—peace with God and peace within our hearts even as we navigate a world that is hostile to the gospel of grace and peace. Making our way through this world demands perseverance and persistence. Those who persevere to the end despite the tribulations are called conquerors or overcomers. The grace and peace essential to be conquerors is a provision of God. In fact these essential resources for salvation and for endurance are brought to believers from God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son. John first highlights God the Father as he who is and who was and who is to come. Last time we considered the significance of the eternal Father. Our main point this morning is to see the significance of God the Holy Spirit in the supply of divine grace and peace. John references the Holy Spirit in verse 4 as "the seven spirits before the throne."

I. The Intriguing Description of the Holy Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit is presented in the salutation as plural. In fact and very importantly he is presented as the seven spirits. Because of the number, it is possible to be confused or even think at first blush that grace and peace are possibly being delivered perhaps by seven angels. However, we must not overlook the fact that John is directing our attention in this salutation NOT to the delivery of grace and peace but rather to the source of grace and peace. "Grace and peace to you FROM him

who was and who is and who is to come and FROM the seven spirits who are before his throne, and FROM Jesus Christ." Angels may minister the grace that is God's, but they are not its source. The seven spirits of God are part of the source. Moreover, the seven spirits are sandwiched in between the references to the Father and to the Son. These three are specifically mentioned in the Great Commission of Jesus, "baptizing [newly made disciples] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Paul concluded 2 Corinthians with "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Clearly, here is a reference to the Holy Spirit, appearing in between a reference to God the Father and God the Son. He is not literally seven spirits but one Spirit spoken of as seven.

B. Why then is the one Holy Spirit spoken of as seven? The most satisfying suggestion of which I am aware starts with the fact that this book is apocalyptic in nature. The number 7 reflects the number of days in a complete week, as God established it from the outset of creation. Seven in this way stands for a whole unit, a completion, and fullness. In that way the seven reflects the whole but dispersed.

C. Since we grasp that the seven spirits actually refer to the one Holy Spirit, we should reflect for a moment on the Triune God. John would have us know that EACH person of the Trinity is uniquely involved in the supply of salvation resources to the churches, to those who believe, to those who will overcome. Looking at the whole of Scripture we may summarize the works of each person of the Trinity.

God the Father administrates. He plans and ordains and oversees the plan. According to Ephesians 1, he chose; he predestined according to the purpose of his will.

God the Son accomplishes. He works in creation but also in redemption to do the redeeming. He paid the price. He bought the church with his own blood. He died to satisfy God's wrath to obtain forgiveness for those the Father chose and gave to him.

And God the Holy Spirit applies. He makes happen what the Father administrates and what the Son accomplishes. God the Holy Spirit brings the dead to life. He applies the blessings of salvation.

Let me just show you a couple things this morning. Turn over in your Bibles for a moment to John 16:7. Jesus is in the midst of his last teaching to the disciples before his crucifixion. And he tells them, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper (speaking of the Holy Spirit) will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you." This may seem confusing. For some reason Jesus had to go in order to send. It would be better when Jesus sent the Spirit, but he would not be sent if Jesus did not go away. Why did he have to go? Well, it is not just disappearance that Jesus is talking about. He is talking about the path by which he would go. He is telling the disciples that he must go away. He is speaking of his departure from them by death, resurrection, and ascension. His going away involved his dying and his rising and his ascending. Now with this in mind, turn to Acts 2. Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost. Multitudes had been drawn together by the sound like a mighty rushing wind as the Spirit of God was poured out on the disciples. Peter proclaims to the multitude that God devised the plan. And according to the plan, Jesus was crucified and killed by men of Israel. He is the Christ, and God raised him up from the dead. Now in verse 33 watch what Peter declares: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." Again we see that the Father has planned. The Son has paid. And the Spirit is applying the benefits of that work in the lives of people. See the Trinity working together! The Father fulfills his role, the Son his, and the Spirit his own role as well.

The Father is essential. The Son is essential. And the Holy Spirit is essential. We are going to see this over and over. If there is to be life, it will be brought by the Spirit. If there is to be light, it will be brought by the Spirit. We simply cannot receive grace and peace without the Holy Spirit.

II. The Significant Location of the Holy Spirit

John notes that the seven spirits from whom come grace and peace are situated "before his throne." That is "before the throne of the eternal God." This point is not to say that the Holy Spirit is any less in deity than the Father, but he is ready to be sent. He is situated as though reporting for duty. His role within the Trinity is to apply the work. Just as Jesus left his glory to become incarnate, the Holy Spirit descends to the earth to do his work. And where would the focus of that work be? Well, here we note with great interest the fact that just as the Spirit of God is represented as seven, so there are seven churches. The number again suggests a dispersion of the whole.

I believe that the Spirit is represented as seven spirits before God's throne at least in part because it is the Spirit who indwells the churches. He comes to take up residence in the churches. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 is laboring to assure that the Corinthians understand the nature of the church. The assembly of believers, says Paul, is in effect God's building, God's temple; it is holy. It is a holy house for God. And so he asks, "Do you not know that you (as a body of believers, the church) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" The church as a whole is God's temple, but individual churches are also God's temples in which the Holy Spirit lives.

Back in Revelation 1:20, the churches are depicted as lamp STANDS or candlesticks before the throne. In chapter 4:5, the seven spirits are depicted as seven torches of fire. That is the lamps or the candles. The Spirit is the LIGHT for the lamps or for the candlesticks! In the ancient world, lamps were placed on lamp stands. Jesus made this point: people light a lamp and put it on a stand. If the churches are the lamp stands and the Holy Spirit is the light which shines from those lamp stands, then the message to the churches is that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings light and life to the churches. As one Bible teacher has said, "The Holy Spirit . . . supplies the church with everything she needs to faithfully shine the light on Jesus Christ in the midst of this hostile world." The true church is God's temple and it is assembled and enlivened and lit by the Holy Spirit.

This important point was foreshadowed by the Lord through the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. The people had returned to Jerusalem after being in captivity in Babylon, and they came back to a mess. The temple had been totally destroyed. The people are wondering how the temple is to be rebuilt. And God gave to Zechariah a vision. It was a golden lampstand with 7 lamps on it. The message of the vision was this. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts." The church is built and sustained not by human effort and expertise, nor by the use of the tools and weapons of the world like politics, manipulation, or the military. The church is built by Jesus Christ through the work of his Spirit. The existence of the church in the world—even though she may be in decline, even though in our times the prominence of the church has receded—the existence of the church is a visible testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit of God right before our eyes. It is the Holy Spirit who comes and in-person he brings life. He directly supplies grace and mercy through his inward working within the church. He enables the church to hold forth the light of the gospel.

We as a church are nothing without the Holy Spirit. We depend completely upon his grace and mercy. And simply knowing this fact is important to our experience of it. Much of the power we are able to experience in our lives as Christians depends on what we know. Everything we are to do as Christians proceeds first from what we know. Paul gives three steps for sanctification in Romans

6—know, consider, and submit. He spends 10 verses on what you must know. Then he allots one verse to what you must consider. Finally, there is but one verse on what you must do. Know the truth. Consider it to be true or believe it. And then act accordingly. Well, for the church to be the light we are meant to be, for us to overcome, to be a conquering church, we must KNOW that we depend absolutely on the Holy Spirit. Then we must BELIEVE it. We must affirm that truth. We must declare it; we must say so. We depend upon the Holy Spirit. And then we must act accordingly.

We have a wonderful example set for us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2. He explains to the Corinthians that his manner of preaching and teaching was designed to display an absence of confidence in himself and his speech or his strength. His confidence rested completely in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he said so. Listen, starting in verse 1. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

Listen, our determination as a church—I am talking Grace Community Church—must be the same. Do we want to experience in our midst the best that human flesh can do? Or do we want to behold the powerful and wondrous working of God? I want the demonstration of the Spirit and power! And I believe you do too. Right? Well we cannot rely on man’s methods, man’s ingenuity, man’s fabricated experiences! We must rely, and we must make it plain that we rely, upon the power of the Spirit of God. And we do that by obeying his word with the testimony and inner conviction that we depend upon him. So we will preach in the Holy Spirit the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit. We will pray in the Holy Spirit. We will teach and admonish and exhort in the Holy Spirit. We will seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with our hearts, giving thanks to God in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We will proclaim our weakness and inability and we will give glory to God. You may ask, “How?” Well, we simply know it; then we believe it; and then, we do what he tells us to do.

III. The Magnificent Multifaceted Work of the Holy Spirit in Believers and in Christ’s Church

Understanding how dependent we are upon the work of the Holy Spirit, leads us to appreciate why John says, “Grace and Peace to you . . . from the seven spirits before his throne.” The power to be able to overcome and to conquer, to persevere through the trials, temptations, turmoil, and tribulations, while it originates with the eternal Father is applied to us personally by the Holy Spirit of God. God is not working in us virtually. No, it is an in-person reality in the person of the Holy Spirit right here in God’s temple which is what we are. I want before closing this morning to just point out a number of the important ways that the Holy Spirit works for the people of God. I am going to set them forth under seven categories.

A. He Enlivens. That is the Holy Spirit is the one who brings unbelievers to life. Jesus taught this work of the Spirit plainly. Recorded in John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom, a person must be born of the Spirit. All human beings are dead in trespasses and sins, but God makes them alive through the agency of the Spirit as he applies spiritual life to dead hearts. No man ever believed in Jesus without first being born of the Spirit. He is essential for being saved by the grace of God.

B. He Convicts. Jesus told the disciples when the Spirit comes, "he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." It is the Holy Spirit who exposes sin. He points out to us and to the world what is wrong with us. He shows us that our sin violates the righteousness of God and will rightly be judged. The Holy Spirit is essential. Many of us are praying for the salvation of lost loved ones. That is great. I think one of the matters we should bring to the Lord is that he by the Holy Spirit would bring conviction upon the hearts of those for whom we are praying. And give thanks that the Holy Spirit has convicted you.

C. He Enlightens. The Holy Spirit is the one who has given us the word of God. All scripture is breathed out by God. The Holy Spirit is that breath. Peter tells us that "no prophecy of Scripture was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). To resist the word of God is to resist the Spirit of God. But the Holy Spirit takes His word—Paul calls it the "sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians—he takes his word and graciously illuminates the mind of human beings to understand it. He is the Spirit of Truth and he teaches the truth to the hearts of those in whom he graciously works. Jesus instructed his disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come, he would teach them all things. Some have wrongly concluded they do not need the word. No, he teaches us from the word he has inspired. We need the Spirit along with the sword of the Spirit.

I want you to see this. Again we turn to 1 Corinthians 2. Again, Paul is explaining how he came proclaiming God's word without impressive speech or worldly persuasion. And he expounds it in this way (1 Corinthians 2:9ff.), "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. . . . no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." He goes on to say that the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, but the spiritual person does because by the Spirit we have the mind of Christ. The bottom line is that you cannot grasp within your being what God has for you apart from the Spirit of God.

D. He Enables. There are a number of things to mention here. The Spirit enables through his indwelling presence in the lives of the individual believer as well as in the assembly of believers. He also gifts to the body abilities and inclinations that work through us for the common good of the body. But he also empowers. It is the Holy Spirit by whom believers are able to keep from sin. Let me give you two references here. Romans 8:13 says, "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if BY THE SPIRIT you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Galatians 5:16 says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." When you walk by the Spirit, he will produce within you the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

E. He Assures. The Holy Spirit seals those who belong to God as his children. He also causes us by his presence to know within that we are children of God. It is by the Spirit that we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:14-17).

F. He Intercedes. The Holy Spirit is before God's throne for the purpose of prayer. You know we have an Advocate before God the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous who is the propitiation for our sins. But we have another kind of advocate before the Father. The Holy "Spirit helps us in our

weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for [the saints] with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

G. Finally, He Glorifies Christ. John 16:13-14. Again Jesus is instructing his disciples on the night he was to be betrayed. He says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The work of the Spirit is to shine the light on Christ. That is the work of the church as well. The church is the lampstand upon which is perched the flame of the Spirit to shine the light upon the glorious Christ and his work. He who said, "Let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That light, that illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit. As believers behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Paul declares, "This is from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The Spirit shines the light on Jesus because he is the one who paid the price required for the Spirit to apply the blessings of salvation. So here we shine the light on Christ who is the image of God. He lived the righteousness of God before us. He is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God. He is Savior, Redeemer. He laid down his life for his sheep. And whoever will call upon his glorious name will be saved. Perhaps today is your day. The Holy Spirit is convicting you that you are a grave sinner against righteous God. He is holding before you the reality of God's judgment. The dread is an overwhelming all-engulfing reality to your soul. Heed the call of the Holy Spirit! Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn from your sin and trust in him. He will save you. He will send His Spirit to dwell in you. He will transform and cleanse you.

Conclusion

Now, see how essential is the Holy Spirit? He is absolutely so. And do you see how meaningful it is that this Revelation promises grace and peace from the Holy Spirit? Without the work of the life-giving Holy Spirit, there would be no repentance, no new birth, no conversions, no gifts, and no church.

As the Lord says through Zechariah, "it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." We absolutely depend upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

As I close I want you to consider the close connection between the Holy Spirit and the church. Christ has bought the church, but the Holy Spirit has birthed the church. The Holy Spirit is essential in the being and working of God. And the church, the local church is essential in the life of the Christian. Do not wonder why you are not experiencing God's power in your life for overcoming if you are being distant from his Holy Spirit indwelt and empowered church. Get in. Get close. Get deep. And behold what he will not do to glorify Christ in your life.

Prayer

Benediction

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.