

The Apostles' Creed

Part 11

I Believe in the Holy Ghost

1 Corinthians 2:10-12

With Study Questions

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1 Corinthians 2:10-12

This morning we will discuss the portion in the Apostles' Creed which states that from His ascended seat, Jesus, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

Applied Redemption

In our study of the Apostles' Creed we have discussed who the God the Father is and what He has done – created heaven and earth. We then pursued a brief study of God the Son – what He has done and will do – died for sinners and will come for judgment. We now turn to God the Spirit. It is the Spirit who reveals and applies these things to the hearts of men.

It is fitting for the portion of the Creed addressing the Spirit to be placed between statements about Jesus and statements about the church (the holy catholic church, the communion of saints). For apart from the Spirit, those things which make the church a house of grace, truth and redemption would not be found. The church itself can be viewed, so to speak, as a Spirit baptized entity.

Who God the Father is and what He has done through His Only Begotten Son, Jesus would have been lost in history apart from the Holy Spirit. Truly the *accomplished* work of redemption – the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus would not be known or believed apart

from the *applied* work of redemption – the Holy Spirit moving men to record the message and regenerating men to believe it.

It should not too difficult for us to conclude what a critical role the Spirit of God plays in the history of redemption – simply put, apart from the Spirit there would be no history of redemption. You and I would still be in our sins, ignorant of the Good News of the cross of Christ and unwilling to believe if we heard it. For this reason we must be very cautious when it comes to who the Spirit of God is and what the Spirit of God does – and doesn't do.

Spirit or Flesh?

We live in very carnal (governed by the flesh or feelings) times. One might say that since the fall men have always been carnal. But in the past 150-200 years the church has seen an influx of theology (especially *pneumatology* – the study of the spirit) which confuses the carnal impulses of man with the illumination, guidance and direction of God's Holy Spirit. I was at one time convinced, then confused and now dismayed and what I hear people testify when it comes to the way the Spirit of God functions in their lives.

Some of these things can be trivial, as when someone says they were moved by the Spirit to give me a call; others can be more intense, as when someone conveys that the Holy Spirit has given them direction and peace in divorcing their spouse, or changing their gender preference. Many churches who operate by the supposed power of the Holy Spirit have all but banished the Jesus of the Scriptures from their congregations.

The most fitting word to describe these religious establishments is 'abusive'. They promise healing, direction, prophetic (foretelling) guidance, prosperity, etc, all for those who can somehow make the discovery of the Spirit filled life. Like the lottery, for every winner there are a thousand loser and souls are shipwrecked.

I recall a conversation with an elderly man who had recently lost his wife and was in fear of losing his faith. He had learned in his church that the Spirit still guides and heals the way He did during the days of Jesus and His apostles. The man applied all he could in obedience to this

doctrine in an effort to save his dying wife. She died nonetheless and I somehow found myself in a conversation with a man who sat between broken-heartedness and bitterness.

I sought to explain to him what I am going to seek to explain to you this morning – the simple doctrine of the Holy Spirit and this relates to our salvation and growth as Christians. What to expect and what not to expect. He said he had gone to his church all his life and had never heard this teaching. So, even though what I am going to mention in the next minutes might seem to be an elementary principle to you, there are many who are confused and abused by a false understanding of the way the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians.

The Apostle Paul wrote of those in the church who were...

...holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. 6 For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:5-7 NASB).

The word for “**impulses**” *epithymiais* means desire or longing. Sadly, we live in a Christian culture which has confused being led by the Spirit with its antithesis, of being led by the flesh. This has resulted in disastrous consequences.

It is my prayer that this is edifying to you, but I also pray that you will in turn edify others with whatever you may take from this brief instruction on the Christian’s belief in the Holy Spirit.

¹Or, *religion*

^b1 Tim. 5:8

^cMatt. 7:15; 2 Thess. 3:6

¹Or, *creep into*

^cTitus 3:3

¹Or, *recognition*

The Giver of Understanding

In a very broad sense it can be said that “The Holy Spirit is the Author of all human wisdom.”¹

But *there is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding (Job 32:8).*

It can be argued that man’s ability to have any understanding of anything at all is a result of his being made in the image of God and in the same way God breathed life into man which He formed out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), God here breaths understanding in man. It might also be argued that if man were sinless, this would sufficiently convey what needs to be known. In fact, many people who consider themselves spirit-filled in this sense operate as if they are unfallen receptacles of God’s natural revelation – as if they can immediately and accurately know the things of God – or anything else for that matter.

But in the light of man’s sinfulness (especially as the Apostle Paul was contending with the philosophers of Greece who were influencing the church) the Holy Spirit brings us the wisdom of God.

But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

Not only does this passage provide ample testimony to the deity (Godhood) of the Spirit – testifying to His omniscience, even of the “**deep things of God**” which no created being could ever plumb, but we also learn at least two other things: that there is a “**spirit of the world against**

¹ Herman Witsius, P&R Publishers, (*The Apostles’ Creed*), p 303.

the Spirit of God,” and that the Spirit has been **“that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”** In other words, the role of the Spirit is one of giving us information and a disposition to believe that information.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:16, 17).

Which Spirit Governs?

What we come to know by the Spirit we will pursue shortly, what we need to attend to now is the ever important distinction we must ever make between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world. Which spirit is governing our hearts?

When John exhorts Christians to **“test the spirits” (1 John 4:1)** what is the means by which that takes place? How does a sinful heart test an evil spirit? Can I use my broken watch to correct my broken clock? We live in a culture where Christians are encouraged to test the spirits with what amounts to be their own visceral comfort.

I asked a pastor who was teaching this way how I could possibly know if the spirit is of God or not. He answered that if I was encouraged it was the Spirit of God. But what if I was encouraged to do evil or believe error? Is my ability to feel right about the situation the measure of truth? John’s answer to this question of testing the spirits is found a few words down where he writes:

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

And who is the **“us”** but those who were with Jesus – those who **“heard”** who had **“seen with our (their) eyes”** who **“hands have (had) handled, concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, 2).** In other words, the

Apostles, to whom Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, would grant supernatural ability to remember “**all things**” (John 14:26) He had said to them.

Here, my friends, is the great dividing line. When we seek to obey John in our testing of the spirits, to whom or what do we go? Students take tests on machine-readable paper that are run through a Scantron scanner. As they hear the little clicks they get an idea of how many answers they got wrong; the Scantron scanner somehow knows the answer.

What is the Scantron scanner by which we test the spirits – by which we test truth itself? Is it, as with Rome, the church? Is it our own visceral comfort? Is it some sort of pragmatic evaluation of what seemed to work? Is it by convention or vote or popular opinion? Where do we find the “**us**” in 1 John 4:6?

For the Christian, the “**us**” is found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Peter writes:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; ²⁰ knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:12-21).

Some might say that Peter is only addressing the Old Testament, since the New Testament was not yet complete. But Peter equates the writing of Paul with Scripture itself (2 Peter 3:16). Add to this that Jesus, while conferring His authority, by the Holy Spirit, to the apostles, also conferred the power to do signs and wonders as a confirmation of their office.

Therefore they (Paul and Barnabas) stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands (Acts 14:3).

The “us” in 1 John 4 is neither the church nor the flesh nor the conventions of society. When Paul writes, **“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4)** he is pitting the Word of God against all other sources of wisdom and knowledge.

What We Come to Know

Assuming we embrace the Scriptures as the work of the Holy Spirit, granting us knowledge of God, what do we come to know by the Spirit—what should Christians expect? What has the Holy Spirit done in your life and what is He doing? How has the Holy Spirit, as it were, applied the redemption which becomes the mortar for the church and what is our experience in that? Are you missing out on the power of the Spirit? Is there power available to the average Christian that he/she is failing to seize?

Regeneration

First we must recognize the Holy Spirit’s work in our regeneration (our born again-ness). Paul writes that **“no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3)**. This is, of course, not the mere verbalizing of words the way a parrot can be trained. It is a genuine recognition that the nature of man restrains him from any genuine profession of faith. Simply put, if you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it is by the Spirit of God.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

Our lack of ability or willingness to perceive the corrupt nature of our own hearts limits our appreciation of what the Spirit of God has already done. People are pining away for more power in their lives (and who doesn't want more power) but we fail to realize the power already unleashed by the Spirit of God who graciously overwhelmed our bitterly darkened enmity toward a good and holy God.

Paul's knowledge of man's sin and God's grace caused him to give thanks to God for the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation. He writes:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit is our “**comforter**” (John 15:26) *parakletos*. The denotes one who comes along side to help – one who gives protection, help and security. It is through the Holy Spirit that we know God is our Father (Romans 8:16).

Sanctification

It is not as if the Holy Spirit opened our eyes to the gospel and then left. The Holy Spirit is also active daily in our sanctification. Ezekiel records:

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:27).

The person who has been truly regenerated (saved) by the Holy Spirit becomes the object of His sanctification.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

It is in light of this work of the Holy Spirit that the Apostle Paul calls out hypocrites. This certainly does not mean that Christians are sinless (at what level would a reviler ever overcome that sin). It does mean that Christians know who their Master is and will seek to repent and overcome the sin that is ever before us.

When the Apostle Paul calls Christians to be “**filled with the Spirit**” (Ephesians 5:18), he is not offering some higher level of Christianity for an elite group of believers who can sense the Spirit’s promptings better than others. In context he is calling Christians to speak to...

...one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:19-21).

To be filled with the Spirit means to do what Paul just wrote. It means to daily put to death the deeds of the flesh (even if they are disguising themselves as the deeds of the Spirit) and do what the Spirit, through Paul (and the other writers of Scripture) call us to do.

True spiritual illumination is not a matter of the Holy Spirit giving us new information but rather opening our eyes and heart to the information already given. It is through the Spirit of God that the blood of Christ is applied to our hearts. It is through the Spirit of Christ that we acknowledge His Lordship in our lives.

Questions for Study

1. Why is it fitting for the Holy Spirit to be mentioned in this portion of the Apostles' Creed (page 2)?
2. What is the difference between the *accomplished* work of redemption and the *applied* work of redemption (pages 3, 4)?
3. Can you think of ways the Holy Spirit is misrepresented? Why is this harmful (pages 3, 4)?
4. What is the difference between the spirit and the flesh (pages 3, 4)?
5. How does the Holy Spirit relate to human understanding in general (page 5)?
6. Why is a special work of the Holy Spirit necessary in terms of knowledge (pages 5, 6)?
7. How would one go about testing the spirits (pages 6-8)?
8. What does the work of the Holy Spirit actually look like in our lives (pages 8-10)?