

I believe in the Holy Spirit

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Date: 08 January 2023

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[0 : 00] Read John chapter 14 from verse 15. But you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. Then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

Jesus replied, Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

These words you hear are not my own. They belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, 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.

[1 : 30] Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. You heard me say, I am going away, and I am coming back to you.

If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe.

I will not say much more to you, for the Prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father, and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Come now, let us leave. Amen. Well, we return this morning then to our series on the Apostles' Creed, beginning today the third major division thereof.

The first paragraph speaks of God the Father, the second and longest of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. And now this third paragraph turns to the Holy Spirit. Now, in the third paragraph, the link between the clauses is less explicit than in previous sections, but I think they are still linked.

[2 : 45] Perhaps we're tempted to think that this is just the miscellaneous paragraph. But no, as Packer puts it, from the creating work of the Father and the rescue work of the Son, the Creed turns now to the recreating work of the Spirit, whereby we are actually made new in and through Christ.

And so we hear of the church that is the new community. We hear of forgiveness that is a new relationship. We hear of resurrection that is a new existence. And we hear of everlasting life that is new fulfillments.

And all of that comes in and through the work of the Spirit. But first comes this profession of faith in the Spirit himself. Now, if you've not been here for the previous parts of the series, or maybe if you've lost track since we began way back in October 2019, we are working very slowly through the Creed because it provides for us a high-level overview of Christian doctrine, the fundamentals outside of which we can't consider one another, brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is the core of the Christian faith. These are the essentials, a summary of the key truths of God's Word. So Philip Schaaf says, the Creed is intelligible and edifying to a child, and fresh and rich to the profoundest Christian scholar, who as he advances in age, delights to go back to primitive foundations and first principles.

So I hope delight has been your experience of the past occasions when we've looked at the Creed, and that it will be again today. So let's remind ourselves of how the Creed goes.

[4 : 26] I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again 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. So today, the first line of this new paragraph, I believe in the Holy Spirit. Now there's different issues to consider with different lines of the Creed.

Some of them, perhaps, we find confusing. Some of them are challenging to believe, that points to miracles beyond our understanding or experience. This line, I believe in the Holy Spirit, it seems to me, is on the surface, at least, thoroughly uncontroversial.

[5 : 36] Of course, if we are Christians, we believe in the Holy Spirit. However, behind that simple statement, I suspect, there may often look a whole host of misunderstandings, and misapprehensions.

Some, perhaps, have an overdeveloped pneumatology. Some are far too focused on the Holy Spirit, and his work. Some going so far, as to deny the genuineness of new birth in Christ, without a particular external manifestation, of spiritual gifts.

Most, of course, stop short of such a point. I suspect, more common in traditional Scottish Christianity, and certainly in most of the circles in which I've moved, more common is an underdeveloped pneumatology.

That's pneuma, as in Greek, for breath or spirit, by the way, like Christology or theology. Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit. So, why an underdeveloped pneumatology?

Well, I suspect, because many of us have never really taken the time to consider who the Holy Spirit is, and what he does, to any great degree. Maybe that's because we're reacting against some of those excesses.

[6 : 43] Maybe we just haven't quite got there yet. Maybe it's because he tends to take a background role in the pages of Scripture, doesn't he? When I was choosing what we'd sing today, I was surprised to find, apparently, only three psalms that make reference to the Holy Spirit.

It may be I missed one or two, but it's certainly fewer than I was expecting to find. We have, don't we, our go-to passages when we want a description of what Jesus is like. We have an abundance of such passages, but there's fewer obvious places to turn for a fleshed-out pneumatology.

I think for many of us, we affirm, of course, I believe in the Holy Spirit, but the truth is, we don't really know who he is. In fact, I suspect, functionally, we often don't really think of him as a he at all, rather as an impersonal force.

Many of us, in an unguarded moment, have, I'm sure, referred to the Holy Spirit as it, rather than he. And yet, the truth we're invited to confess here in the Creed is that he is not only a person, but one of three persons of the Godhead, part of the Holy Trinity.

And we reduce him in our minds and in our speech to an it. So, this morning, let's spend a little while thinking about his identity, and then we'll turn to consider his work.

[8 : 08] Identity, and then work, and two subheadings under the theme of identity. First, he is personal, and second, he is divine. So, personal Holy Spirit.

Herman Wittzius, in his sacred dissertations on what is called the Apostles' Creed, he identifies four proofs of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The first is that personal properties are attributed to him.

That is to say, he has understanding, and he has a will. So, listen to what Paul writes to the Corinthians. These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

So, says Paul, the Spirit searches, and the Spirit knows. An impersonal force cannot know something. I suppose sometimes we might kind of speak somewhat loosely of a computer, knowing what's on my calendar, or whatever it might be.

[9 : 17] But we know the reality is that the computer or the book, for that matter, it might store information, but the information isn't known until it's delivered back to a human being to do the knowing, to a person.

When we say the Spirit knows, we implicitly say that he is a person. Later in the same letter, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, and says, all these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Notice the Spirit works, distributes, and determines. Without those caveats, without that clarity of how the gifts come, I suppose we might conceivably think of those gifts and abilities as kind of impersonally bestowed, sort of like the spider bite that gives Peter Parker his superpowers.

But these things don't come arbitrarily by a cosmic ray. No, Paul says this is the personal choice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has understanding and has will.

He has personal properties. Secondly, the Holy Spirit makes personal appearances. The most obvious of these, to my mind at least, is at Jesus' baptism.

[10 : 34] That's recorded in Luke 3.22 as follows. The Holy Spirit descended on him, Jesus, in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven.

You are my son whom I love. With you I am well pleased. Vizzius points out that, yes, we do often read in Scripture of angels behaving similarly, descending and being seen in spiritual form, but nowhere do we find a spiritual quality descend or assume a visible appearance.

Truth does not take on bodily form. Honor does not have a physical appearance. Maybe in the pages of a certain genre of fantasy novels, but not in the real world.

Not in the pages of Scripture. It is the Holy Spirit who makes a personal appearance in bodily form. He is a person. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit takes personal action.

He does stuff. So consider, for instance, Acts chapter 8. Having baptized the eunuch immediately, Philip is taken away by the Spirit. Chapter 13, the Spirit speaks, asking for Paul and Barnabas to be set apart.

[11 : 48] Romans 8, Paul tells us, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes on our behalf. He does things. Now, granted, sometimes actions are attributed in Scripture to impersonal forces.

The law is said to do something. Sin does something. Love does something. However, when we look at it honestly, we can see that where that's happening, these are figures of speech in a way that is clearly not true of these passages that talk about the Holy Spirit acting.

The Holy Spirit physically, practically, meaningfully does things. Fourth and final basis for calling him a person who's spoken of in the same manner and the same breath as those who are obviously and undoubtedly persons.

A single example will make this abundantly clear. I imagine it's a familiar one to many of you. Jesus said, 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.

Now, to do something in the name of is to do it by the authority of, by the command of. So just as Father and Son are authors of baptism, so too the Holy Spirit.

[13 : 07] Those of you who are on the ball might plausibly object, are we not also told to baptize with the Holy Spirit? Just the same as we're told to baptize with water and ask how can an instrument be a person?

Well, properly speaking, when we talk about being baptized with the Holy Spirit, what we're referring to really is being endued and enriched by the gifts and the grace of the Holy Spirit, which are themselves properties of a person.

But even if you were to deny that that's what's going on in being baptized with the Spirit, well, actually, we do need to accept that not every time the Bible uses the term Holy Spirit is a direct reference to the person.

Sometimes, Scripture does use the term metonymically to denote the gifts of the Spirit. We speak of what comes from the Spirit as though it were the Spirit.

But the fact that it's sometimes used that way doesn't diminish the reality of his personhood. Rather, it serves to demonstrate how broad language can be used.

[14 : 17] So, I hope it is amply demonstrated that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an abstract force. Now, why have we spent time on something that probably none of you would have denied?

If I'd asked you, is the Holy Spirit a person? I imagine most of you would have said yes. Well, first, we do so because it is actually dangerous to assume that people believe as the Bible teaches.

And second, we've done so because it's one of those truths that does very readily fall to the backs of our minds. And that matters because it seems to me that actually to speak incorrectly of one of the persons of the Trinity, whether in our minds or out loud, and therefore to speak of the one true God in an improper manner.

It seems to me that actually matters a great deal. That's dishonoring to him. That's blasphemy. Is it understandable to accidentally refer to the Holy Spirit as it?

Yes, it's understandable, but it's also sin, and we should repent of it and ask for the ability to speak wisely and well. Second aspect then of his identity, the Holy Spirit is divine.

[15 : 29] He is actually God. The Holy Spirit is not an angel. He is not near to God. He is not a God with a lowercase g. He is not some kind of holy created being.

No, the Holy Spirit is divine, completely, fully, equal with Father and Son. And in fact, it's right there in his name, isn't it? The Holy Spirit.

It's interesting, isn't it? He's the only person of the Trinity of whom we typically say that when referring to him. Scripture does refer in certain places to the Holy Father and calls the Son the Holy One.

We're not saying the Holy Spirit is somehow more holy, but our usage reflects the frequency with which he is so denominated in God's Word. So why is he called the Holy Spirit so often in God's Word?

Well, I think perhaps because the sanctification of believers, which is to say our being made holy, that sanctification is usually attributed to the Spirit.

[16 : 33] Again, not because it's somehow the work of the Spirit to the exclusion of other persons of the Trinity. No, they operate together with one purpose. But different things are attributed to one person particularly.

And that which results from the merit of the actions of the Son, so our regeneration, our sanctification, these things are particularly the province of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Son.

In any case, one particular proof of the divinity of the Spirit. Consider Psalm 95. From the end of verse 7, today, if only you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness where your ancestors tested me.

They tried me though they had seen what I did. For 40 years, I was angry with that generation. I said, they are a people whose hearts go astray and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest.

So who's speaking there in Psalm 95? Very obviously, this is God speaking, isn't it? In the Psalms, we hear various voices. We hear David speak.

[17 : 45] We hear plenty of human individuals speak. But here, clearly, this is Yahweh himself. This is the one who brought his people out of Egypt, the one who provided for them in the wilderness, the God who was tested and rejected by those same people.

It is God speaking in Psalm 95. How does Hebrews speak of this Psalm? Chapter 3, verse 7 reads, so as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice and so on.

So Hebrews quotes from Psalm 95 and attributes that speech to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one and the same Yahweh who was tempted in the desert, who showed himself to be the God of Israel by his magnificent works and so on.

The Holy Spirit is Yahweh, the Holy Spirit is God, the Holy Spirit is divine. Could make the same point from how Paul in Acts 28 attributes to the Spirit words that are spoken from the throne of Almighty God in the grand and glorious vision of Isaiah 6.

Few passages of Scripture have a more obvious divinity present than Isaiah 6 and Paul says that is the Spirit speaking. So my friends, the Holy Spirit is not some lesser divinity.

[19 : 03] He is not a junior partner. He is not a jumped up angel. No, the Holy Spirit is truly God himself in every way, worthy of our acknowledgement, our praise, and our worship.

So if that is the identity of the Holy Spirit who is a divine person, let's turn now to consider his work. Some of us, I suspect, have quite a narrow and quite a confused view of his work.

We imagine that what he does is he brings us these weird gifts that we don't entirely understand but we've heard we're supposed to want even though we're not sure why we would in fact want those things.

Alternatively, some of us maybe have a very exotic view of the Spirit's work associating him exclusively with the unusual Christian experience, with the euphoric feeling, with the vision, the revelation, the supernatural healing.

But all of those are secondary elements of how he works. There's much we could say about the work of the Holy Spirit but I want to limit it to three points on his work and here we'll focus more directly on what we read from John 14 earlier.

- [20 : 16] So first, the Holy Spirit makes us children. Second, the Holy Spirit makes us obedient children. Third, the Holy Spirit points us consistently to Jesus. So, the Holy Spirit makes us children.

Did you notice verse 18 of the reading as Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure hours before his arrest, Jesus says to them, I will not leave you as orphans.

this is the result of the coming of the advocate, the comforter, the supporter of verse 16, the one who's characterized in verse 17 of the Spirit of truth.

The fact that this person comes and lives with Jesus' disciples and will be in them and in us is what means they and we are no longer orphans.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. we can say the Holy Spirit is the instrumental cause of our adoption into the family of God.

- [21 : 17] I wonder if somebody asked you to describe yourself, said to, who are you? I wonder what you would say. Speaking to one African missionary, he says, you begin by saying, I am the husband of one wife.

Maybe the qualifier one sounds a little bit odd in Scotland, but still being a husband is a significant part of my identity. I'm a father to five children. I'm a son. I'm a brother.

And we can continue on into how we spend our time and our work and our hobbies and so on. All of that is true. All of that is part of who I am. But what does all of that have in common?

All of it could change. All those parts of my identity could be taken away from me. Joanna and I have been married for 15 years. It's a big part of who I am.

But some of you know all too well that that part of your identity could one day change. And the same is true of those other relationships. We hope and pray they will long endure, but we acknowledge that is not certain.

- [22 : 26] I was talking to someone a couple of weeks ago about the danger of wrapping up our identity and our work. Because when that goes badly, then we're crushed. We feel like failures. And of course, you could be redundant.

The company could go bust. That part of your identity can be taken from you. Everything about our identity is changeable and uncertain. Except for one exception.

Only one aspect of our identity cannot possibly be taken from us. It is absolutely and completely secure. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are adopted sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. If you are a believer in Christ, then that is what the Holy Spirit has done for you.

You are not an orphan. You are a beloved child. So the Holy Spirit makes us children. Second, He makes us obedient children.

- [23 : 26] Here we go back to the first verse of the reading. If you love me, keep my commands. The love that's natural in the family according to verse 21 is intrinsically linked to the keeping of Jesus' commands.

And maybe when you talk about being obedient children, maybe it sounds stifling or sounds contrived, but the reality could not be further from that. As we've already seen, that keeping of commands is linked with love.

But more than that, listen to verse 23. Jesus replied, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

You noticed that before? I don't think I had until I was listening to Matt Chandler's sermon earlier this week. Father and Son make their home with their adopted family.

Folks, how do you go about making a home? Maybe when you first move in, you're just glad to have a roof over your head, but sooner or later you start to notice the things that aren't quite right, don't you?

[24 : 28] The sinks that don't drain the way they should, the light switch that wiggles alarmingly when you press it, the wallpaper that's peeling a bit in the corner. Or it can be more serious. Maybe when the electrician comes and fixes that light switch, he finds the more significant problems and suddenly you're rewiring the house.

The pipe pops off the sink and floods the whole bathroom. Making a home means righting those wrongs, doesn't it? It means fixing the things that aren't as they should be and it means doing that not because you dislike the house, but actually doing that because you love it, because you want it to be all it can be, because you want it to be a home.

Isn't the same true of the Holy Spirit's work in us? Speaking to all the saints, I'm often struck by how rarely there's any kind of complacency in them. The Holy Spirit has been at work there over many decades, showing where things aren't as they should be, pointing the uncomfortable finger at those favorite sins, at the things we tolerate in ourselves that we never would in others, pointing at those aspects of our character that our younger self didn't even consider ugly and yet today pain us so greatly.

The process of becoming obedient children may not well be a pleasant one. There can be great discomfort along the way. Hebrews 4 reminds us the Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

[26 : 11] So the Spirit of God illumines to us the Word of God. It uses the Bible to judge our thoughts and our attitudes.

And when He does that, we may not like what we see. But just the same as the sight of yourself in the mirror might have motivated a New Year dietary regime, well, so to the sight of yourself laid bare by God's Word, in front of Him and to your own understanding.

So to that sight may be the means of our renewal and our sanctification, which may be costly and painful. But wonderfully, we know the One who shows us that does so from love, working all things for our good.

And furthermore, we know He does it not simply to show us and then say, okay, so go and fix that. No, He is beside us every step of the way, our comforter and our advocate.

Finally, as well as showing us ourselves, the Holy Spirit shows us Jesus. Verse 26 says He will remind the disciples of everything Jesus said to them. And a couple of chapters down the line He follows up.

[27 : 29] 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 the 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 glorify Me. Remember, this is Jesus speaking. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine.

That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you. The Spirit glorifies the Son. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus.

And therefore, to an extent, where we began is forgivable, even reasonable, isn't it? Do you not think all that much about the Holy Spirit? Well, folks, if that's because you're relentlessly focused on Christ, then I think the Holy Spirit would be okay with that because His purpose is not to gather attention to Himself.

I still think some of us think too little or in the wrong way. But, well, He lives to point us to Jesus. As Packer puts it, Jesus' words indicate the self-effacing character of the Spirit.

[28 : 38] He functions as a floodlight trained on Christ so that it is Christ, not the Spirit, whom we see. In the Gospel message, Jesus is set before us throughout saying, come to Me, follow Me.

In our conscience, as we hear the Gospel with the inner ear of faith, the Spirit standing behind us, as it were, to throw light over our shoulder onto Jesus, constantly urges, go to Him, deal with Him.

So we do. And it is this that makes our lives Christian. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, we thank You for how You have been at work this morning, illuminating the Word to us, showing us who You are and showing us what You do in our lives.

We thank You for the privilege of being counted as children. We pray that You will continue that work of making us obedient children. we recognize it may be painful for us, but we know it is for our good as You make Your home with us.

Continue to show us, Jesus, we pray, that we might be with Him and we might be like Him as You transform us from within. Amen.