

I Believe in the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] I believe in the Holy Spirit, so says the Apostles' Creed. From the earliest days of the church, Christians were aware of and spiritually experienced the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. A Christianity without the Holy Spirit is no Christianity at all.

The early Christians, in a confession called the Nicene Creed, expanded on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by saying, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son, He is worshipped and glorified.

We speak much, and rightly so, about the Father and the Son, but perhaps not so much about the Holy Spirit. And yet, as that creed tells us, with the Father and the Son, He is to be worshipped and glorified. So are we right to speak so little about Him? I'll leave that for you to decide.

Well, the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit doesn't begin with Jesus and the Apostles, but right back at the beginning of creation, where in Genesis 1 verse 2, we read of the unformed earth that God created, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep. There at the beginning.

He's there right at the end as well, where in Revelation 22 verse 17, we read, the Spirit and the Bride say, come. If we were to detail every aspect of the Bible's presentation of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does, we'd be here a very long time.

[1 : 50] So I've confined our short study this evening to Jesus' words in John chapter 16 and from verse 1 to 15. You'll find this on page 902. It would be good if you could have this open in front of you because, well, some of this teaching is quite deep, and if you don't have it in front of you, you'll miss the point. You'll miss the point. Page 902. John chapter 16.

I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming then when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. Think of the Apostle Paul. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father nor me. But I have said these things to you that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you. And then these are the words down to verse 15.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you. But now I'm going to him who sent me. And none of you asks me, where are you going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It's to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, concerning sin because they do not believe in me, concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer, concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. For he will speak not on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. Therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[4 : 30] Now, this is part of Jesus' famous upper room discourse delivered on the night of his betrayal. In just a few hours, he's going to be betrayed by Judas into the hands of the Jewish leaders, and from there, the Romans will crucify him. So, in this discourse, therefore, Jesus is preparing his disciples for a physical life without him. He'll still be with them, but it will be the presence of the Holy Spirit. A word before we begin in earnest. The Holy Spirit is not a force, a power, or an object. He is a person. Jesus is not a force. The Father is not an object.

In the same way, throughout our passage, the Holy Spirit is referred to as he. He is a person with all the fullness of a personality. He can be pleased. He can be grieved. He has his own will.

Let's not call him it any more than we would refer to each other as it. Well, having cleared that truth about his personhood, let's look at this passage.

And before we get to the three functions of the Holy Spirit according to Jesus, let's consider the two titles or names he is given. So, in verse 7, he is called the helper. The helper. Now, this is the English translation of a Greek word, paraclete, which means the one who is called alongside. You know, parallel lines are beside, alongside each other, para. And cleat comes from the Greek verb kaleo, which means to call. Called alongside. Jesus sends him to be alongside us. This word, depending upon the translation of Scripture that you're using, is variously translated as helper, advocate, and most memorably of all, of course, comforter. How blessed the comfort the Holy Spirit brings to a struggling Christian. How wonderful the gift that God has given us. The paraclete who stands beside him in his majesty, even as he stands beside us in our misery. Isn't that amazing? The paraclete who stands alongside God and his majesty. At the same time, he stands alongside us in our misery.

The Holy Spirit, the one called alongside, does life with us in all its ups and downs, in all its joys and sorrows. But then in verse 13, the Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of Truth.

[7:31] From the first, it's evident the Holy Spirit is, of course, a spirit. Unlike God the Son, Jesus, he does not possess a body. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, but the Holy Spirit, like God the Father, remains spirit only, and therefore he cannot be seen.

A purely rational approach, which believes only that which our eyes can see and our ears can hear, would dismiss his presence in this place. Can't see him. He's not here.

But as Christians, we've seen the impact he has both upon us and our church. In the same way, we can't see the wind, we can feel its impact. So we cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we can see his impact in changed lives, in times of intimate fellowship with the Lord, and comfort in our grief.

But he's also called the Spirit of Truth. There's no falseness or deceit in him. We'll come back to this in a wee while. The key thought here is the Holy Spirit communicates truth to his people. He tells us the truth. In our strange society, we do not know who to believe to tell us the truth.

But we can trust the Holy Spirit to tell us the truth. The whole truth. I'm nothing but the truth. So in our passage, he's called the helper and the spirit of truth. In the New Testament, he has many other names. For example, in Acts 16, he's called the spirit of Jesus.

[9:18] And as we'll see again in a wee while, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Jesus are so interconnected that there are times when it's difficult to separate them.

Likewise, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as doing many different things. But according to our passage here in John 16, from the second part of verse 4 to the end of verse 15, Jesus speaks of him as doing three things. Three things. He convicts the world, he guides us, and he glorifies Christ. He convicts the world, he guides us, and he glorifies Christ.

I'd like to think that by the end of our study, we'd conclude that perhaps we're not so far off the biblical balance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as maybe we think we are. First of all then, he convicts the world. He convicts the world. And when he comes, verse 8, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Now, this is a notoriously difficult verse to understand. So, I'm unashamed in saying that I'm following the brilliant Don Carson in his commentary in the Gospel of John. Maybe some of you have that commentary. I'm following him on this. He tells us that we're not to understand this word convict in a judicial sense, as to say that the Holy Spirit is the prosecuting attorney in God's courtroom where the world stands guilty before God, and God the Holy Spirit is engaged in proving their guilt.

It's not a courtroom setting. Carson wants to propose, rather, that we understand the Holy Spirit's convicting work in a personal sense. I quote, not a courtroom, but bringing the world to repentance. When we think of this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work, therefore, we're closely connecting it with repentance, of turning away from sin and those things we know to be wrong and turning toward God. Repentance strikes us as such a judgmental, solemn word, but in reality, repentance, though it cuts deep, is full of joy. The role of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of repentance, to call it away from sin, and to call it to faith in Jesus Christ.

[12:19] First, Jesus himself highlights three areas in which the Holy Spirit calls the world to repentance. In the first instance, he calls the world to repentance concerning sin, concerning sin,

because, as we read in verse 9, they do not believe in me. They do not believe in me. Those who do not believe in Jesus cannot accept what Jesus says about sin and its offensiveness to God. So, they'll look at Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, well, you know, to look at a woman lustfully in your heart is entirely as sinful as committing adultery physically with her. And they can't take that teaching. And they can't take and accept Jesus' teaching concerning religious hypocrisy.

But the heart of our religion is the religion of our hearts. They can't accept that. It's all about what people see me do in a religious setting. But listen to what Don Carson says of this aspect of the Holy Spirit's convicting work. This convicting work of the Holy Spirit is gracious. It's filled with grace. It is designed to bring men and women of the world to recognize their need and so turn to Jesus. Secondly, the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning righteousness. Because again, as we read in verse 10, I go to the Father and you will see me no longer. The world thought that when it had crucified Jesus, it had seen the last of him. But when God sent the Holy Spirit upon the early church, the world began to see a group of Christians who talked like Jesus, who lived like Jesus, and loved each other like Jesus. The church, empowered by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had sent, became the conscience of the world. Jesus himself earlier said, remember in the Sermon on the Mount, he said, you are the light of the world. Let your light shine so that they, the world, may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Why do you suppose the world around us ridicules and mocks the church today? Is not part of it, at least, that our biblical values of family life and hard, honest work confront its immorality, that its standards of mercy and love and forgiveness fly in the face of our society. The Spirit-driven and Spirit-empowered church will have the same impact upon the world Jesus did when he confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They hated him. They hated him. And on account of our likeness to Jesus, they'll hate us also. But then thirdly, the Holy Spirit convicts the world, calls the world to repentance concerning judgment, because as we again we read in verse 10, verse 11 rather, because the ruler of this world is judged. The false judgment of this world led to the crucifixion of Jesus. It nailed him to a cross for no other reason than that he told the truth, and rather than play the hypocrite, called for genuine devotion to God. But in the world's judgment of Jesus, it was actually the ruler of this world, the devil who was being judged. The cross of Jesus became the weapon of the devil's, of Jesus' justice rather. The cross of Jesus became the weapon of Jesus' justice, because on the cross Jesus forever destroyed the devil's power and put an end to his rule. All who judge falsely, like the devil, will face the same judgment as he. Maybe you've not grasped these three points, and that's fine, because to go back a little bit, Jesus' point is this. The role of the Holy Spirit is to call the world to repentance, to expose the evilness of its sin, to make it ashamed by the church's Christ-likeness, and to display the triumph of Jesus on the cross.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit, Carson says, is gracious. It is designed to bring men and women of the world to recognize their need, and so turn to Jesus. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit, even in this solemn task, which Jesus has spoken of here in John 16, is full of grace, because he's inviting the world, the whole world, through the church's gospel words and gospel works, to turn to Jesus. He convicts the world.

[17 : 53] The second aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in this passage is that he guides us. He guides us.

In verse 12, Jesus says, I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will speak not on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

By the force of his imminent death, remember Jesus has just a few hours left before he is arrested, he has still many things to teach his disciples, but he'll not be able to. But when Jesus ascends to heaven, and from there ascends his Holy Spirit upon his disciples, he will continue to speak to them through his Spirit. He will continue to teach them, and I quote, guiding them into all truth, and declaring to them the things that are to come. Now, I wanted to bear in mind that these men gathered in the upper room, many of them would go on to write down letters in the New Testament. What Jesus is saying here is that the Holy Spirit will guide and superintend their writing, so that what they write down in their Gospels and in their letters shall be exactly what he wants them to say.

He will, to use Peter's language, carry them along in their writing. He's going to inspire John to write the very words of the heavenly Jesus, so that everything he writes will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The Holy Spirit's going to bring to the disciples' minds those famous episodes in his life, his birth, his baptism, his public ministry, with all its sermons and parables and miracles, his passion, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension. Together with these episodes, the Holy Spirit will explain to the disciples the meaning of all these events, so that in the New Testament letters we have them interpreted for us.

[20 : 15] What Jesus describes in this verse here, 12 and 13, is what we call inspiration. The inspiration of Scripture. That the work of the Holy Spirit is closely connected with the production of the Bible, the Word of God, the testimony about Jesus the Messiah. When we say that the Bible is inspired by God, we mean that the Holy Spirit spoke to the different personalities of these apostles to write down exactly what he wanted them to say. Remember, he is the Spirit of truth, and therefore the Bible is the truth. When we cast doubt upon the truthfulness and reliability of the Bible, ultimately we're not casting doubt on the truthfulness of a book, but on the truthfulness of its author. And in this case, its author is the Holy Spirit. Now, this is where the Reformed faith, the faith that we cherish, with its insistence upon the centrality of the Bible, comes into its own. Many Christians claim that we don't speak enough about the Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the expression of what we believe in the

Reformed church, in its introductory chapter, entitled, on Holy Scripture, mentions the Holy Spirit four times in the context of the production and the interpretation of the Bible. In other words, the Reformed fathers placed a premium upon the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the Bible, the Word of God. Because it's ultimately here in the pages of the Bible, the testimony about Jesus, we see the Holy Spirit at work, and we hear his voice. When we open our Bibles, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us. Now, someone might say to you, what did the Holy Spirit say to you this morning? What did the Holy Spirit say to you this morning?

Well, you can talk about that passage you read that morning from the Bible in your devotions, because it was the Holy Spirit was speaking to you from it. So, according to this text, Jesus will inspire the apostles to write the Scriptures. But with us, he works in a different way. He doesn't inspire us to write new Scriptures. Rather, he illuminates the Scriptures he has already caused to be written down.

He helps us to understand what they mean and how they can guide us in our day-to-day Christian lives. Just like a torch illuminates a dark room, so the Holy Spirit sheds light on the Bible for us, so we can see what these words mean for us, so we can understand the meaning of the cross, so we can feel the urgency of God's call to repent and believe the gospel. We comprehend the urgency of the apostle call to put sin to death and to live for righteousness. Without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, these central truths of the Christian faith would remain dark and irrelevant to us.

Now, we know this is true by our experience. When we feel the truth of a passage of Scripture pressing down upon us in a new way, that is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit guiding us into all truth. Every time we open our Bibles, and especially when it's being faithfully preached, the Holy Spirit is illuminating for us the importance, practicality, relevance, and urgency of the truth about Jesus. It is quite a common thing for someone to describe their conversion to Christ as being like a light switched on in their minds. Once, though they read the Bible, it remained a closed book to them. But now they read, and it's alive, and it's exciting. It's as if the Bible is speaking just to them. That's a sure sign of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in them, guiding them into all truth, just as He said He would.

[24 : 50] So, when we say, I believe in the Holy Spirit, we're in essence confessing that we believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible and of the Spirit's ability to speak to us today through His living Word.

When we say, I believe in the Holy Spirit, we are in essence also confessing that we believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible and of the Spirit's ability today to speak to us through His Word. Perhaps then, in light of this, it's not really very fair to say that we in the Reformed Church don't talk enough about the Holy Spirit, since whenever we open our Bible in our Word-centered discipleship, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through His Word. The Holy Spirit is speaking to us from His inspired Word, illuminating us in His Word as to the beauty, the relevance, the love, the grace, and the majesty of the gospel.

The only way we can honestly say, I believe in the Holy Spirit, is to hold a Bible in our hands as we say it. He guides us.

Well, then thirdly and finally, He glorifies Christ. He glorifies Christ. The last function of the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus in this passage, is in verse 14.

[26 : 23] He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. He will glorify me. Now, this is partly connected, of course, to our previous point, for what is Christ's and declared to us is contained in the Bible.

However, it's those first few words which are important to us here. He will glorify me. Remember how in John chapter 17, verse 4, in His high priestly prayer, Jesus prays to His Father, saying, I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do.

Jesus' work on earth was to glorify His Father in heaven. And now we find that the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, the Son of God. Here is the Spirit's function.

It is to glorify Jesus, to draw attention to, to elevate the person and work of Jesus in our hearts and minds, to the extent that we, along with the Spirit, and along with all the angels of heaven, praise, glorify, and exalt King Jesus.

His role is not to draw attention to Himself, but to draw attention to Jesus. Last night, Catherine and myself went for a walk in the city centre in George Square.

[27 : 50] And looking at Glasgow City Chambers, it really is a magnificent building by any measure. The roads around it are filled with potholes, but the building itself is magnificent. It forms almost the entire eastern edge of George Square.

The building inspires awe. The floodlights in front of the building are very cleverly positioned to throw light onto its best aspects.

At night, we see Glasgow City Chambers because of its floodlights. The Holy Spirit is like those floodlights. Their role is to throw light on the building.

The Holy Spirit's role is to throw light on Jesus. His role is entirely selfless. He illuminates the Bible for us to show us the person and work of Christ.

He lights up the cross and resurrection as the pinnacles of Christ's glory. He points us to the wonders of Christ's gracious gifts to us in the gospel. He warms our hearts with the love of Jesus.

[28 : 58] He doesn't draw attention to himself, but to Jesus. It's the Holy Spirit who introduces us to Jesus in the first place. Remember, convicting us of our need of Him and bringing us to repentance.

It's the Holy Spirit who gives us a new heart and dwells within us to give us new strength and new hope in God. It's the Holy Spirit who fills our lives with hope and meaning. If ever we needed a helper, we have it in the Holy Spirit.

No wonder King David in that psalm we sung, Psalm 51, prayed most earnestly, Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Of course we may pray directly to the Holy Spirit and sometimes it's right to do so.

And it's right that He, along with the Father and the Son, is to be worshipped and glorified. But in the economy of our salvation, the Holy Spirit's role is not to glorify Himself, but to glorify Jesus.

As we close, therefore, let me offer the following two brief applications. Consider how complete is God's work of salvation.

[30 : 14] Consider how complete is God's work of salvation. In His love and grace and wisdom, He has left nothing to chance, nothing at all.

Let's rest content in God, knowing that He has given us everything we need to live in grace, in holiness, and in love. Let's rest assured that He has every base of our discipleship covered.

And that in His love and wisdom by His Spirit, He's working all things together for our good. But then, in the second instance, consider the words of Jesus.

Jesus, when in another place, in the Sermon on the Mount, He said and promised that He will give His Spirit to all who ask Him. He'll give His Holy Spirit to anyone who asks Him.

That as we ask and seek and knock, the Father will generously pour out His Spirit upon us. His Spirit, our work through us, will invite those non-Christians to whom we speak to repentance and faith in Jesus.

[31 : 27] His Holy Spirit at work in us will illuminate His precious Word, the Bible. His Spirit at work for us will help us to live in a way that glorifies Jesus.

Jesus promises that He'll give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. So let's pray here in our church for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us as individuals and upon our church.

Then next time we stand together to confess our faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed, when it comes to this statement, we'll be able to say it with the confidence of our lived experience.
I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit.