

The Nicene Creed (2): We Believe in the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] Life itself is a school and nature is always a fresh study. These words were written by the forgotten man of Scottish history.

! Hugh Muller was a stonemason from Cromerty on the Black Isle where Hamish Davidson is from. As a stonemason he travelled widely around Scotland and began to write about the places he visited.

His writing attracted so much praise that he was asked to edit a Scottish newspaper called The Witness. Hugh Muller wrote on many issues, science, culture and Christianity.

In the mid-19th century no man had more influence upon the cultural temperature of Scotland than Hugh Muller and yet I guess less than half of us have heard of his name.

He's the forgotten man of Scottish history. In 325 AD, 1700 years ago, the Roman Emperor Constantine called together 318 Christian bishops from all over the Middle East to the small Turkish town of Nicaea.

[1 : 20] And he called them there to establish once for all the Christian position on who we call the Trinity. We believe in one God, but he is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And the document they produced is what we call the Nicene Creed. And it is the basic statement of what all Christians everywhere must believe if they are to be called Christians.

And we're going to recite it now together. We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

[2 : 45] For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

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.

He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen. Amen. This creed is divided into four sections, each beginning with the words, we believe.

[3 : 58] Its first section begins, we believe in one God, the Father Almighty. Its second section begins, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Its third section begins, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord. It's this third section we wish to focus our attention upon this morning, the fourth section being next week.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord. The one God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the forgotten person of the Trinity. We speak much about God, the Father, even more about the Lord, Jesus Christ.

But we give scant attention to the Holy Spirit. And yet, he along with the Father and the Son is in the words of the creed, to be worshipped and to be glorified.

[5 : 00] He is the humiliter of the Trinity. He is the forgotten person. But without whom God would not be God. So the Nicene Creed says, 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 is to be worshipped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. Though the Holy Spirit is the forgotten person of the Trinity, we want to ask two questions about him this morning in the hope that we do not forget about him.

First of all, who is the Holy Spirit? And secondly, what does the Holy Spirit do? First of all then, who is the Holy Spirit? Who is the Holy Spirit?

A common man in the street will never have heard of the Holy Spirit. He'll have heard of God. He'll probably have heard of Jesus Christ. But never the Holy Spirit. But as Christians, the Holy Spirit is entirely as important to us as God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps this is the first time you've ever heard of the Holy Spirit. And you find all this talk of a spirit mysterious. The only time you ever hear of a spirit is when you're watching a ghost hunting program on telly or you're ordering a whiskey from a bar.

[6 : 17] But to say and to call him the Spirit is to say of him, you can't see him. He has no physical existence. But for those who say they don't believe in anything they can't see, well, we can't see love either.

But we know that love exists. And we can't see the wind either, but we know the wind exists. We see the effects of love. We see the effects of the wind. And in the same way, although we cannot see the Holy Spirit because he has no physical existence, we see the effects of his work.

He is also called holy. And to say this of him is to say that he is very different from us. The Holy Spirit is one of a kind.

And it's no surprise we find all this very mysterious because he is, to use Star Trek terms, of a different dimension than we are. Likewise, the Bible talks of many kinds of spirit, and some of them are very evil.

Jesus encountered many evil spirits during his ministry. But the Holy Spirit is morally and ethically perfect. He is holy. And then the Creed says of him that he is the Lord.

[7 : 31] Just as the Father is Lord, and Jesus Christ is Lord, so the Holy Spirit is Lord. To say of him that he is the Lord is to attribute to him the same properties as Father and Son.

He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He is almighty, all-knowing, and all-present. Just like we bow down to worship Father and Son, so we bow down to worship Him.

But then the Creed says of him that he proceeds from the Father and the Son. He proceeds from the Father and the Son. And in saying this, the Creed is repeating the language of the passage we read together in John, when in verse 26, Jesus says, when the Helper comes, who I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father.

He proceeds. He comes forth from the Father and the Son. Well, what does that mean? It means in the first instance, the Holy Spirit is not created.

He is of the same essence as the Father and the Son. There has never been a time when the Holy Spirit was not. Because nothing comes forth from God unless it is God Himself.

[8 : 45] As sure as there is only one God, the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of God. It means, secondly, that He is not an impersonal force.

He is a person with all the characteristics of individuality. The Creed says, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, not what proceeds.

The word who can only be used to talk of a person. The Holy Spirit's not an it. It's not a force like wind or like love.

The Holy Spirit's a who. He's a person. But thirdly, it means that just as definitively we cannot say what it means for the Lord Jesus Christ to be begotten and not made, we cannot say with any certainty what it means for the Holy Spirit to proceed from the Father and the Son.

We just don't know what it means. And this teaches us an important truth. As human beings, we want to understand everything.

[9 : 50] But because we aren't God, there are some things we will never understand. Some things which will always remain mysterious to us. Ultimately, when it comes to this expression, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, we're in the realm of mystery.

The French reformer John Calvin said of this, it is a mystery to be adored rather than to be investigated. It's a mystery to be adored rather than investigated.

There are certain things we can learn from the Bible about the Holy Spirit, but beyond that, he's mysterious. We can relate to God the Father because we all have earthly fathers.

We can relate to the Lord Jesus Christ because we read about him in the Gospels and he was flesh and blood, just like us. Perhaps one of the reasons we find the Holy Spirit so mysterious is that we can't compare him to anything.

We just see the effects of his work. And yet along with Father and Son, we are to worship and glorify him. For without him, there would be nothing rather than something, death rather than life, and darkness rather than light.

[11:07] This is who the Holy Spirit is. Second, what does the Holy Spirit do? What does he do? As I said, we can't see love, but we see the effects of love.

We can't see the wind, but we see the effects of the wind. In the same way, we can't see the Holy Spirit, but we see the effects of his presence. And in the language of the Creed, the effect of his work is that he is the giver of life.

The giver of life, and he spoke to the prophets. The giver of life, who spoke to the prophets. To say of him that he is the giver of life is to say that the life of the universe is in him.

We first meet the Holy Spirit at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1, verse 2, where we read of him, and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

From the beginning of creation, the Holy Spirit was giving life and bringing order from chaos. In the creation of humanity, we read that God breathed into the nostrils of the first man, and he became a living being.

[12:19] That breath, that wind, was the Holy Spirit who was the life-giving source of all life. The common man may never have heard of the Holy Spirit, but without the Holy Spirit, there would be no common man.

There would be nothing at all. All life finds its source in the Holy Spirit. He's the giver of life. And in this sense, we see the effects of the Holy Spirit at work every day in the world in which we live. But the Nicene Fathers want us to understand, they're in a hurry to get us to understand, that the Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual life.

He is the beginning and the middle and the end of all true Christian life. He's the giver of spiritual life, and without him, there would be no spiritual life at all.

He is active at the beginning of our Christian lives. He's active at the beginning of our Christian lives in what we call the new birth, the new birth.

[13:26] By nature, as human beings, because of our ignorance and sin, we are spiritually insensitive. We know that there is a God, but we do not want Him.

By nature, we would never choose to follow God because every faculty of who we are is fallen. It is when the Holy Spirit gives us new birth that for the first time we see who God really is, and the cross on which Jesus died becomes the most important thing in life to us.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross becomes the difference between life and death, hope and despair, meaning and lostness, guilt and forgiveness. In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul says, it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God. God gives us faith, and that gift is the Holy Spirit who works faith in us so we may believe and trust that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.

Whenever someone becomes a Christian, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit has been at work in them. Yes, of course, we chose to believe in Jesus, but only because the Holy Spirit gave us spiritual life and the gift of faith.

[14:49] When we may ask someone, why did you become a Christian? They might answer by referring to their past life and saying how guilty they felt, how lost they felt, how despairing they felt, but at its deepest level, the reason someone becomes a Christian is because the Holy Spirit gave them spiritual life and faith to believe in Jesus.

How do we apply this? This is very opposite given our National Day of Prayer and Wednesday. How do we apply this truth about the Holy Spirit giving life so we believe in Christ's regeneration? If before a person believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit must first wake them up, then surely we must devote ourselves to prayer, to pleading with God that He would send His Spirit to give life to those with whom we share the gospel.

Nicene theology draws us to our knees in prayer. The prayer meetings of this church are the most evangelistically powerful activity in which we engage.

For it's from there God sends His Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of unbelievers to give them, as He has given us, new birth.

[16:12] the Lord, the giver of life, compels us to reevaluate our congregational priorities and put prayer at the top of our list.

If the Holy Spirit is active at the beginning of our Christian lives, He's also active all the way through our Christian lives. All the way through. John 14, 17, Jesus says of Him, He dwells in you.

He lives in you. He lives in the heart of the Christian, always giving new spiritual life. We've already read of one of the ways in which He's with us from John 15, 26.

He is the helper. The Holy Spirit, the helper. The Holy Spirit helps us in all our weaknesses. For all that we may put a face on things, and we do, we're all weak in our own ways, right?

According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit gives us strength. The Holy Spirit helps us when we're finding it difficult to pray. He prays for us even though we can't use words.

[17:19] He helps us. We could go on. He gives us the ability to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. Like a master sculptor, He's shaping us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ with ever-increasing glory.

We're becoming more loving, forgiving, and kind. The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance of our faith. It's through Him we know that we are sons and daughters of the living God.

He brings us into a deeper relationship with God than we could ever have dreamt possible. The Holy Spirit brings joy into the life of a Christian. Even in the dark times, the Christian can rejoice in his or her salvation because of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit brings hope into the life of the Christian. He is the seal of our inheritance, assuring us that even if the worst should happen to us, the best shall happen to us.

In John 6, 63, Jesus says, it is the Spirit who gives life. No wonder then we read in the Bible, be filled with the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit.

[18:25] It was when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they received power to be witnesses of the living Christ and his gospel and the world was turned upside down.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart brings fulfillment, joy, and satisfaction. So whenever we see a young Christian growing in their faith, it's because the Holy Spirit is at work in her.

We cannot see the wind, but we see the effect it has in the same way we see the effects of the Holy Spirit in the life of the growing Christian as she matures into a joyful, fulfilled, and Christ-like person. Again, whenever we see a Christian going through hard times, but still clinging to his faith in Christ, it's because the Holy Spirit is at work in him. We cannot see love, but we see the effect it has, and in the same way we see the effect of the work of the Holy Spirit through the tears of the suffering Christian as she continues to testify to the grace of God at work in her life.

If the Holy Spirit is active at the beginning of our Christian lives and all the way through our Christian lives, He's also active at the end of our Christian lives. At the end of our Christian lives. We read in Romans chapter 8 and verse 11, Romans 8-11, If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

[20:03] The same Holy Spirit who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day will also raise us from the dead on the last day. It's the Holy Spirit who gives new life to the dead.

It's the Holy Spirit who is present at the very instant of a Christian's death and transports their spirit straight into the presence of God.

It's the Holy Spirit who will raise the Christian's body from the ground and reunite both spirit and body in the new heavens and the new earth.

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life, something most beautiful. Without Him there would be no life. Whenever you think of the Holy Spirit, think life.

Life now, life eternal. When Jesus said, I've come to give life and life to the full, think of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and from the Son.

[21:07] But the Nicene Creed also says of the Holy Spirit, He spoke by the prophets. He spoke by the prophets. This is a reference to how the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible.

He's the ultimate author of the Bible. In 2 Peter 1, verse 21, we read, No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The word of the Bible is the speech of the Holy Spirit. Whether it's Moses who speaks in Exodus or the Apostle John who speaks in Revelation or Jesus in the Gospels, you're hearing the voice of the

Holy Spirit.

You're experiencing His power as you read His words in the Bible. And this is how the circle is squared of how the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life.

It is through the word He spoke that He gives life. It is through the words of the Bible He brings a sinful man or woman to see his or her need of Jesus.

[22 : 15] It is as the Bible is preached in his or her hearing, the Holy Spirit drives home with power the words she hears to her heart. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 the Apostle Paul is giving thanks for the way in which the Christians in Thessalonica responded to the word he preached.

And I quote these are his words. Our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

When the word of God is faithfully preached the power of the Spirit flows in saving conviction.

Likewise it is through the word of the Spirit a Christian grows in his or her faith.

In his great high priestly prayer in John 17 Jesus prays to the Father concerning his disciples. He says sanctify them in your truth. Make them holy in your truth.

Your word is truth. It is through the Bible the Holy Spirit strengthens the Christian in weak times gives light to the Christian in dark times and gives life to the Christian in dying times.

[23 : 32] It is through the words he has spoken in the Bible the Holy Spirit guides us in what's right and wrong. In particular the Holy Spirit shows us Jesus. Like the floodlights at the front of our building in the evening.

the Holy Spirit points us away from himself and points us to Jesus. The floodlights point to the church not to themselves.

The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus not to himself. Well what is our response to all this? Surely it is to join with the Nicene fathers as they say with the Father and the Son he is to be worshipped and glorified.

With the Father and the Son he is to be worshipped and glorified. But how are we to worship and glorify him? Given that the role of the Holy Spirit is the giver of life and that he does this by speaking through his word about Jesus the best way to worship and glorify the Holy Spirit is to put our faith and trust in the Jesus he reveals to us in the Bible.

The best way to worship and glorify the Holy Spirit is to put our faith and trust in the Jesus he reveals to us in the Bible. Although we talk about him and we use his name in our services of worship the ultimate reality is that the Holy Spirit is happy if I may use these words to be the forgotten person of the Trinity just as like our floodlights he points to Jesus he's happy to remain in the background.

[25 : 23] Perhaps Hugh Miller didn't want to be forgotten who knows? We shall not forget the Holy Spirit because every time we lift up our voices to sing the praise of God we're singing his words and we're singing with hearts filled with the warmth of praises that he has given us.

Every time we close our eyes to pray we're praying using the Holy Spirit's words and we're praying with hearts filled with those issues the Holy Spirit has burdened us with. Every time we baptize a child like Rachel we're doing so in the name singular of the Father Son and Holy Spirit trusting that in his own good time the Holy Spirit will draw Rachel and every child baptized to Jesus.

And every time we open our Bibles to preach we're speaking the Spirit's words and he's working in power in the hearts and minds of its listeners. But ultimately ultimately all we've learned coalesces around this truth this truth the main reason the Nicene Fathers want us to say we believe in the Holy Spirit is because they working together with the Holy Spirit want us to put our faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven.

How can we best worship and glorify the Holy Spirit? by placing our faith in what Jesus did on the cross by giving himself as the sacrifice for our sin.

By placing our faith in what Jesus did on the cross by giving himself as the sacrifice for our sin. Have you done that yet? Young or old have you done that yet?

[27 : 30] If not in the quietness of your heart right now pray for the Holy Spirit to help you do that.

For the faith you need to be a Christian. He the Holy Spirit will give you the kind of life you have never dreamt possible.

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