

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Sermon on the Third Article

I Corinthians 2: 10 – 16

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

It happens every time – people are always looking desperately for something in themselves which would give them at least a little credit for their salvation. For example, one can understand and acknowledge that one cannot claim credit for being born into God's family any more than claim credit for being born into a human family. A person agrees, "*But first I have to*

repent – and when God sees that I am truly sorry for the wrong I've done, he has pity on me and, as in the parable, he takes back his prodigal child again.”

With that, a person feels certain that he or she has found at least some small credit toward salvation. But there is a catch: the prodigal child already belonged to an earthly family, but no one belongs to the family of God by nature. On the contrary, in Ephesians 2:3 we read: **(we have been) gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.** Paul tells us in Romans 8:7: **the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** To change our natural condition requires some pretty drastic surgery which only God can do. In Psalm 51:10 we read that God must . . . **create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, . . .**

This is repentance: a change from a self-motivated to a God-motivated heart. God through the Holy Spirit brings us to an awareness of the dreadful results of going our own way through the revelation of the Law and its curse. Through the revelation of God's love and blessings that are found in the Gospel we are motivated to go God's way – not from fear, but from love.

But what about the statements of God requiring us to repent and believe? When you teach a child to write, you tell the

child to write and then hold its hand while helping to form the letters. In this way the child forms the letters because you are helping to form them. The child's own unaided hand produces only meaningless scribbles. And thus the Christian confesses in Galatians 2:20: **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

In other words, fallen people are simply imperfect creatures that need improvement: a natural born creature is a rebel who must be overcome and conquered by the Holy Spirit. Through the Law God stops a person in its tracks. Through the Gospel, God draws people to Christ, the one and only Savior. All of this is God's work as it is written in Ephesians 2:10: **For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.**

The self-motivated heart continues to exist and to exert itself side by side with the God-motivated heart in the Christian's life. A believer is in daily need of this renewing operation of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:17: **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** Not only did we need the Holy Ghost to bring us to faith, but we continually need the Holy Ghost to keep us in the

true faith. Therefore, we continually need to confess as we do in the Third Article (of Martin Luther's Catechism):

I Believe in the Holy Ghost

Let us consider what we believe regarding

I. the Holy Ghost's Person

II. The Holy Ghost's Work

I – The Holy Ghost's Person

We believe and teach that the Holy Ghost is the third person in the Holy Trinity. The Holy Ghost is true God and equal with the Father and with the Son. It has been asserted by some that the Holy Ghost is merely a power of influence, but not a distinct person in the Godhead. As we examine Scripture we find that the Holy Ghost knows, feels, and wills and is endowed with a mind, hence a distinct person. Now, the Holy Ghost is one who knows the deep things of God and teaches them to us as we read in I Corinthians 2:10: ... but God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit of man within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

A distinct will is ascribed to the Holy Ghost as it reads in I Corinthians 12:11: **All these (*various spiritual gifts*) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each man, just as he determines.** Also a mind is ascribed to the third person in the Holy Trinity as it is written in Romans 8:27: **And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.**

The quality of love is also ascribed to the Holy Spirit in Romans 15:30: **I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.** His love has prompted him to come into this world, to seek out men in their lost estate, and by the Gospel reveal Jesus Christ to them and bring them to a saving knowledge of the truth.

Furthermore we read that the Holy Spirit is "*grieved*" (*saddened*) by the sins of the believers - by anything in our acts or thoughts that have the taint of sin in it; but we know that only a person can be grieved.

Just as the Holy Ghost was present at the baptism of Jesus and revealed himself in the form of a dove, just as he was present at the first Pentecost and revealed in the form of the cloven tongues of fire, so he is also present at every Christian baptism. The command to baptize is found in Matthew 28: 19:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost is not as some heretics taught and still teach, simply a divine power, a divine energy - but is a distinct person, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Another lucid text is John 14: 16, 17 where our Savior says: **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor know him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.** The Unitarians will not understand this and many others who merely go by what they see and can understand with logic. They follow their blind reason; **We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.** II Corinthians 10:4, 5

Furthermore we believe that this distinct person is true God. Peter's words to Ananias make this clear in Acts 5:3: **Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . You have not lied to men but to God.** One cannot lie to an influence or energy or mere power, but one can lie to a person. Hence the Holy Ghost is a person and St. Peter here called the Holy Ghost - God.

II – The Holy Ghost’s Work

The Holy Ghost is called Holy because he himself is holy and his work is that of making us holy, it is often referred to as the work of SANCTIFICATION. The work of each person in the Trinity is necessary for our salvation. The Father gave his Son, the Son gave himself, and the Holy Ghost gives the fruits of Christ’s redemption. To illustrate: Here is a man who is very sick; he cannot move or help himself. The doctor comes and looking at him, writes a prescription. Does that make the man well? No, indeed for his relatives must go and have the prescription filled. Again we ask: Does this make him well? No – they must give him the medicine in a spoon. Well, somewhat like that you may imagine the work of God in the healing of the sick, sinful man. The Father wrote the prescription, made the plan of salvation, the Son filled the prescription by his suffering and death; the Holy Ghost applies it to the sinner by the Gospel and the Sacraments. He makes us poor, sick creatures well again and renews us. Thus, if we are not born again by water and the Spirit, we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

New York City has its own marvelous water system. If you travel upstate, you will find large reservoirs that are like lakes. When you ask, “*What are these?*” you will be told that this is the water supply for the city of New York. “*But,*” you ask, “*the city is*

far away, over a hundred miles away. How can this water be of any value to the people?" You are told that the water is brought down to the city by means of aqueducts, and eventually led to each individual facet.

Similarly, we can envision the great reservoir of God's love - the waters of life for many. All that Christ has procured for us through his life and death, all things are ready. But how can all this benefit us? The Holy Ghost, through the aqueducts of the Word, applies to our hearts the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Why is all this necessary and why must we ever confess, "*I believe in the Holy Ghost?*" - because without the Holy Ghost we could never believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him. By nature we are spiritually blind, dead and an enemy of God. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit a person cannot see that he or she is a sinner, nor understand why an innocent one should be a scapegoat. The Holy Ghost removes the bandage from our eyes, endows us with spiritual power to see, understand, and appreciate God's order of salvation. We are dead in trespasses and sin. Conversion is a change from death to life. God infuses new life, purifies the emotions, gives us a new heart, and renews our wills.

A man, 84 years old, was asked how old he was. He said, "*Four years old.*" How was that? He said that four years ago he

had become a Christian and was regenerated and new-born. So, he said: I am four years old. Christians are twice-born people, first, according to the flesh; secondly, according to the Spirit. Thus Paul was turned from a Jesus-hater to a Jesus-lover. This round-about-face is called conversion and it is all the work of the Holy Ghost. For no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

As all the zeros placed to the left of a numeral are of no value and as all the zeros placed to the right of a numeral increase the value, so also all the works done before you have faith are valueless before God. But all the works done after you have faith are valuable. Works that appear great and good in the sight of men, in the sight of God may be nothing but “shining vices”. Such are the so-called good works of unbelievers for the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6: **And without faith it is impossible to please God ...** And again it is written in Romans 14:23: **... and everything that does not come from faith is sin.** Jesus says In John 15:5 of himself and all those who believe in him: **I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** As long as we remain united to Jesus the vine by a living faith, we are given the power to perform good works pleasing to God. This shows that only a Christian can do good works as they are God’s

workmanship created in Christ Jesus. Only Christians perform good works out of faith and love to Jesus. Only Christians perform good works according to God's will and not the commandments of men. Only Christians perform good works giving all glory and credit to God and for the benefit of their neighbors.

God says in Romans 1:16: **... it is the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes; . .** The church dispenses the Word and the Sacraments which are the only means by which faith may be preserved. The Church is the armory of Christian warfare, it is the hearth where the fires of love are kept burning. Let us all remember that in Ephesians 22:8, 9 it says: **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.** When men boast that they can be Christian without coming to church or the Lord's Table, they are vainly boasting in their own ability. By coming to church regularly and by reading the Bible at home every Christian thereby testifies that it is only by the grace of God that he or she exists. The Christian will be able to continue in the true faith with the help of the Holy Ghost.

We pray that God's Holy Spirit might not be taken away from us, for he alone brings us to faith and keeps us in the true faith. Therefore a true Christian confesses that his salvation from beginning to end is due to the work of the Spirit of God. We must

confess that we have not contributed one iota to our salvation. Therefore we will never pose as a little savior, we will never be able to sing the song of redemption in our own honor – but instead, with bowed heads say: *“Praise, honor, and glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.”*

Amen. For this is most certainly true.

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