

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

23 What Do Christians Believe About the Holy Spirit?

Scripture: Acts 2:1-8; 11-21

Today is Pentecost or Whitsunday according to ecclesiastical observance. It ranks with three other important days celebrated by the primitive Christian church. These days were Christmas, Easter and Ascensiontide. The day commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Disciples and the results of that event. Pentecost is the greatest event in the history of the Christian church and we may consider it a very great tragedy that for so many sincere and earnest people it has little or no meaning. I say tragic because it is through the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit that the great reservoir of God's blessing is opened and made available to us. This truth is found in Ephesians 1:3. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* More correctly, *"who hath blessed us by the Spirit blessings."*

It would be surprising if someone was here this morning who had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Within the framework of the Christian teaching there is impressive truth having to do with the Holy Spirit. Anyone even remotely associated with this teaching has heard about this third person of the Trinity. What is not generally understood is that this Holy Spirit can be known as a friend much the same as Jesus is known in that way. Therefore, we ought to know who he is and what he is able to do. Perhaps the best definition of the Holy Spirit which we can understand is this: The Holy Spirit is God in this world and in the human heart. Let us consider together this matter of the historical Pentecost as well as the **identity** of the Holy Spirit, the **ministry** of the Holy Spirit and the **necessity** of the Holy Spirit's help.

I. THE HISTORICAL PENTECOST:

Pentecost was an old Jewish harvest feast. Being the second in importance of the festivals, it annually drew large crowds of Jewish pilgrims from the Diaspora (Dispersion: those living outside Palestine) into Jerusalem. This feast celebrated a great religious thanksgiving for the year's harvest and was called the *"Feast of First fruits."* (Exodus 23:16) It was also called the *"Feast of Weeks"* because the day was reckoned by counting seven weeks after the Pasch. (Leviticus 23:15-21)

The word "*Pentecost*" comes from the Greek "pentekoste" (the fiftieth), meaning the fiftieth day after Easter. The Jews used the word not only to indicate the feast itself, but also the whole season of fifty days preceding it. It was in this connection that Luke records in Acts 2:1, "*When the days of Pentecost were in the process of being fulfilled, they were all in one accord in one place.*" The early Christian church accepted the Jewish usage and called the whole season from Easter to Whitsunday "Pentecost." The English word "Whitsunday" originated when newly baptized believers appeared in white garments for the worship.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He definitely promised that there would be such an event as Pentecost. In that passage which is called the Charter of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16) Jesus outlined the fact that the Spirit would be their Comforter (14:16), Teacher (14:26), Revealer (15:26), and Reprover (16:7-14). He breathed on them His Spirit as a foretaste of what was to come. (John 20:22) He further commanded them to wait for the "*promise of the Father.*" (Acts 1:4) It is that promise which gives meaning to the Feast of Pentecost. God promises in different ways. One way was through the law given to Moses which brought into being certain feasts: passover, first-fruits, pentecost, tabernacles, and others. This information was given to Moses and superimposed upon the people. The Passover Feast was one of atonement and was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. You remember Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples and then died on the cross. The feast of first-fruits, or Pentecost, came seven weeks plus one day after Passover. Thus, the disciples tarried in prayer, the reading of Scripture, and in expectancy until the types in the Old Testament were fulfilled.

We may also say that the promise of the Father came through the prophets. Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel. (Joel 2:28-32; also Ezekiel 36:26-27) Another thought has to do with the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, and a people chosen before the foundation of the world. This could be true as a covenant of redemption existed between the members of the God-head. Theologians therefore speak of the work of the Trinity in redemption. The Father agreed to elect, establish, decree and order. The Son agreed to die for the whole of mankind. The Spirit agreed to apply redemption's merit. Pentecost is a fulfillment of the covenant God had made within the Trinity. The historical Pentecost with its miraculous signs announced a new era in which the Holy Spirit would serve as executor of the Trinity, bringing to bear among men the eternal plan of God. This is the age of the Holy Spirit although the Father and Son

minister through the church as well. (**Modalism:** The teaching that there was a successive manifestation of deity rather than three simultaneous persons or centers of consciousness as authentic Trinitarianism teaches.) It should be noted here that there are certain aspects of the historic Pentecost which will not be repeated, these were incidental and external elements which were not necessary to the church's life. They ceased upon the birth of the church or at least the death of those present at the time. Those aspects being the physical presence of the church in one place, the sound of a mighty, rushing wind from heaven, the divided tongues of flame which rested on the foreheads, the speaking of languages of all nations without an interpreter so that the message spoken was understood by all. We do not seek another historical Pentecost, to do so, can lead to an unfortunate distortion. As we shall see, those aspects of Pentecost which will be repeated are the comfort and peace which Jesus promised, the capacity to serve Christ effectively, the spiritual unity among believers, and the work of God in Making believers like the Lord Jesus Christ. We are able to speak of Pentecost as an unrepeatable happening also in that the Holy Spirit can be permanently owned but once. This involved a prior arranged time (Acts 2:1), the fulfillment of an Old Testament type (Leviticus 23:15-22), and an appointed place (Luke 24:49).

The historic Pentecost marked the arrival of the Holy Spirit to reside on earth. (John 14:6 - abide, Greek "Menei" means remain) (John 16:7-8, 16:13) The historic Pentecost introduced a new order. An outstanding sign was given to prove the inclusion of the Gentiles into the family of God. (Acts 2:38-39)

II. THE IDENTITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

In addressing ourselves to the identity of the Holy Spirit we will think upon His personality and His deity. Personality or personhood has been defined as that which can be approached or shunned, trusted or doubted, loved or hated, adored or insulted. Five dimensions are contained within the realm of personality and these are all found in the Holy Spirit. The reason we have difficulty in apprehending the personality of the Holy Spirit is because we only understand personality in terms of what is corporeal, i.e. bodily existence. We must learn not to equate personality with the physical. We find the personality of the Holy Spirit implied in the fact that He possesses **volition or will**. I Corinthians 12:11 reads "*to every man severally as He wills,*" speaking of the Spirit's bestowal of gifts. (See also Acts 13:2, 20:28; Romans 8:26; John 16:13) The Holy Spirit has **intelligence**, (Romans 8:27) and **knowledge** (I Corinthians 2:10-12). He is able

to bestow the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. (I Corinthians 12:8) The Holy Spirit has **feeling**, and **sensibility**. He can be, grieved. (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30) The Holy Spirit has the capacity to love. (Romans 15:30; James 4:5) The Holy Spirit has **self-consciousness**. In the Acts 13:2 reference the Holy Spirit speaks of Himself as I. Dr. Leander Keyser in his **Handbook of Christian Psychology** asks the question, "What is the most outstanding mark of human experience? Is it not that we are personal, self-conscious beings? The consciousness of self is a universal experience. There is not a normal person in the world who does not say "I" many times without count, and this pronoun of the first person in all languages is the sign manual of self-conscious personality."

The gospels imply the personality of the Holy Spirit again and again with the use of pronouns. The Greek word for spirit is "pneuma" and is actually neuter in gender. One would expect a neuter pronoun in reference to it. Yet, whenever the Holy Spirit is spoken of, it is not with a neuter pronoun, but always the masculine pronoun "he" is used. *"He shall glorify me."* (John 16:14) *"He will reprove the world."* (John 16:8) *"He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies."* (Romans 8:26) *"He will teach you all things."* (John 14:26) *"I will send him unto you."* (John 16:7) Furthermore, the name of the Holy Spirit implies personality. In, John 14:16 Jesus promised another comforter. The word "comforter" is "paraclete" meaning "a part-taker," literally one who is called along side to help. The word "another" in that verse means "one like the original." Just as Jesus took part in infirmities and was about to ascend to heaven, so He promised that He would send another person like Himself to be with them. The word "comfortless" in John 14:18 is literally "orphans." Jesus is telling the disciples that nothing but a person could take His place nor would he leave them as orphans without the care of another person.

The Holy Spirit is not only a person, but a divine person. He is one of the three persons of the Godhead, eternal, pre-existent, co-equal with God the Father. When we speak of the Holy Spirit we are not speaking of some force or energy of God like gravitation, magnetism, or electricity. The Scriptures make it very clear that the Holy Spirit is the third center of consciousness of the Trinity. Paul, in his beautiful benediction of II Corinthians 13:13 writes, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."* (See I Corinthians 12:4-6; I Peter 1:2) In Acts 5:3-4 the Holy Spirit is equated with God. We also find that divine attributes are ascribed to Him. In Hebrews 9:14 He is called *"the eternal Spirit."* He is described as being

omnipresent in Psalm 139:7 and I Corinthians 12:13. In Romans 8:11 He is omnipotent and in I Corinthians 2:10-11, He is omniscient. The Holy Spirit also performs the works of deity. He gives life (John 6 63; Romans 8:2). He was an agent in creation (Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30), and in I Corinthians 2 you have that great passage dealing with the mind of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, the third member of the Holy Trinity.

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

Many are the wonderful works of the Holy Spirit. We may speak of them in reference to the world in which we live, the Lord Jesus Christ, the human race, the church, and the individual believer.

1. The World in Which We Live:

The Holy Spirit gives life (Job 33:4). The Holy Spirit was the agent in bringing order to the heavens and giving life to man (Job 26:13; Isaiah 40:12; Genesis 2:7). Furthermore, he sustains the vegetation and the animal world (Psalm 104:10-14, 21, 27)

2. The Spirit's Work in Jesus Christ:

Jesus was begotten (received his human nature) through the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:35) Jesus was anointed for service by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 4:13-18) Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 4:1) Jesus was given wisdom by the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 11:2) Jesus led a spotless life and offered himself to God by the Holy Spirit. (Hebrews 9:14) Jesus cast out demons by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:28) Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:11)

3. The Spirit's Work in the Human Race:

He strives with men. (Genesis 6:3) He witnesses to men about Jesus Christ. (John 15:26-27) He convicts men. (John 16:8-11) This conviction is threefold. First, of sin. What sin? Not the sin of a broken law, we have a conscience for that. Rather, the sin of not believing on Christ. Secondly, of righteousness. What righteousness is that? The righteousness of the Lord who fulfilled the will of God. Men are convicted of that righteousness which is available but rejected. Thirdly, of judgment. What judgment? The judgment which took place at Calvary. The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the worth of Calvary to men.

4. The Spirit's Work in the Church:

The Holy Spirit forms the church. (I Corinthians 12:13) He abides in the church. (II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22) He builds the church. (Ephesians 4:3; Acts 1:8) The Holy Spirit presides over and guides the church into all the will of God. The story of the first church council in Acts 15 illustrates this. The Holy Spirit equips the church. (I Corinthians 12)

5. The Spirit's Work in the Believer:

The Holy Spirit regenerates the believer. (Titus 3:5; John 3:3; II Corinthians 3:6) He baptizes the believer into Christ. (I Corinthians 12:13) He indwells the believer. (I Corinthians 3:16) He strengthens the believer. (Ephesians 3:16) He leads the believer into a holy life. (Romans 8:14) He bears witness with the believer's spirit that he is a child of God. (Romans 8:16) He seals the believer. (Ephesians 4:30) (As a sign of ownership, a guarantee of a completed transaction, and as an assurance of being God's property forever.) The Holy Spirit produces fruit in the believer's life. (Galatians 5:19-23; Romans 15:13) The Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth. (John 16:13; I John 2:20, 27) He recalls the words of Christ. (John 14:26) He reveals the deep things of God. (I Corinthians 2:9, 14) He directs the believer in prayer. (Jude 20) He enables the believer to communicate in power: (I Corinthians 2:1-5) He inspires worship. (Philippians 3:3) He calls certain ones to specific tasks. (Acts 13:2,4) He guides where to go and not go. (Acts 8:27-29) He anoints for special service. (II Corinthians 1:21; John 2:20,27; Numbers 27:18; I Samuel 16:12-13; Ezekiel 2:2-3) He fills the believer. (Ephesians 5:18)

III. THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Is the Holy Spirit important to our lives? He is imperative. Unless we know the Holy Spirit, unless we know who He is, and know Him experientially, we will never live a personally satisfying or effective Christian life. Do we know the Holy Spirit as a person rather than some vague impersonal influence? Do we know His ministry to our lives? The Holy Spirit was given in order to occupy a strategic place in the life of every Christian. It is imperative to know who He is and what He does. This is the starting point, it is impossible to appropriate His power otherwise.

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