

# THE APOSTLES CREED

## Session 4

### I. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

A. Any discussion of the Holy Spirit needs to begin with the reminder that in speaking of the Spirit we are still speaking of God, the God who is Triune (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). One of the best ways in which to think of the Holy Spirit is to think of him within the context of God's self-revelation. This helps us to remember that the work of the Spirit is intimately related to the work of the Son and the work of both fulfills the purposes of the Father.

B. In 1 John, John makes the point that we know God in two different but mutually supplementary ways.

1. God has revealed himself to us visibly in his Son Jesus Christ. Christ is a revelation "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1).
2. God has also revealed himself to us through the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God actually dwells among us. God reveals himself to us in the Son not so that we will merely acquire accurate information about him but so that he may dwell within us through the Holy Spirit.

C. In Christ, God has revealed himself to us visibly within history (Romans 5:6-11). Through the Spirit, God is present with us now confirming that we are indeed his adopted children (Romans 8:15-16) and opening us to what he has revealed in Christ (John 14:25-26). There is no Christian life apart from the work of both Christ and the Holy Spirit.

D. The Gospel of John makes it clear that the work of the Son and the Spirit are distinguishable but not separable. In preparing the disciples for his departure, Jesus tells them that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to them in Jesus' name and that the Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Through the Holy Spirit sent from the Father, the disciples will remain connected to Jesus in a living way.

### II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST

A. Acts 2 provides an account of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The festival celebrated the giving of Torah on Mt. Sinai and Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate it.

B. Being Jews, all of Jesus' disciples were present for the festival and were "all together" in the Upper Room (Acts 1:13). Suddenly "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (2:4). A crowd gathers and all the assembled hear the disciples speaking about what God has done in Jesus in their own language. This is clearly a reversal of the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. The Holy Spirit reverses the confusion and division brought about by sin. The Holy Spirit comes not to provide isolated doses of inspiration to people but to bring about among people the reconciliation accomplished by the Son.

C. In Acts 2:17-21 Peter cites Joel 2:28-32 in order to provide an interpretation of what has just happened and to make the point that the gift of the Spirit had been promised in the Old Testament and that his being poured out "on all flesh" (2:17) is a sign that God's plan to redeem the human race had reached its culmination. Peter also makes it clear that the coming of the Holy Spirit is the direct result of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension (2:33-35).

D. There are two essential points to be made about Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. First, the coming of the Spirit upon “all flesh” fulfills God’s promise in the Old Testament. Second, the coming of the Spirit is the consequence of the change in the relationship brought about in Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the gift which God gives to those who are reconciled to him through Jesus Christ. Pentecost also tells us something significant about the Church. The Church is not a newly created religious organization but Israel brought to her fulfillment. The gift of the Spirit is not something odd or strange but part of God’s plan to restore the human race.

### III. “I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT”

A. Who is the Holy Spirit? “God the Holy Spirit is the third Person in the one Being of the Holy Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son, and equally worthy of our honor and worship” (TBC, 81). The divine attributes possessed by the Father and the Son are also possessed by the Holy Spirit who is sent from the Father and who enables us share in the salvation brought about by the Son.

B. Through the Holy Spirit the redeeming work of Christ remains for all time a contemporary event. The Holy Spirit can be referred to as Comforter, Guide, Counselor, Advocate or Helper (TBC, 82). The Spirit is God’s intimate and powerful Presence with us. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in the name of the Son (John 14:26). In the Holy Spirit God is both the Giver and the Gift since what he gives us in the Spirit is Himself. Whenever we speak of the Holy Spirit doing something we are speaking about the personal action of God.

### IV. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. In Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit is manifold and diverse. In saying this, however, we have to remember a basic principle of Christian theology: All three Persons of the Trinity always act together. When we speak of the work of the Holy Spirit, we are speaking of that work in which the Spirit is identified as the primary agent but not the only agent. This can be seen in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ baptism. In Matthew’s account (Matthew 3:13-17), for example, the Father anoints his Son with the Holy Spirit and serves as the Son’s ultimate witness: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”. The work of salvation is a work of the whole Trinity. The work of the Spirit can be summarized under seven headings.

1. **Through the Holy Spirit, God creates and sustains all life.** All creatures simply by virtue of being creatures have a relationship to God through the Spirit. When we speak of the Holy Spirit we are speaking fundamentally about God’s presence in creation and about God’s unlimited capacity to create, sustain and renew life. The life of all creation (human and non-human) is sustained by God through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, all of creation has a “spiritual life”
2. **Through the Holy Spirit, God makes us to be specifically human creatures.** Our humanity, our personhood, is a gift from God. There is a very real sense in which we have received ourselves from God. When we speak of the work of the Spirit we should not think in terms of “religion” but, rather, in terms of God restoring our true humanity to us.
3. **Through the Holy Spirit, God brings about faith in us.** Faith in its true sense is a supernatural act and cannot come about without God. Because genuine faith is not simply a set of ideas about God but a relationship with God, it must be initiated by the Spirit (Romans 8:15-17). Another way to think about this is to say that the Spirit purifies our hearts and minds so that we can come to faith and that without this purification faith is impossible (Romans 8:6-9). This means that faith is a supernatural gift, something that we cannot produce ourselves.
4. **Through the Holy Spirit, God communicates to us the resurrection life of Jesus.** To be a Christian is to share in the resurrection life of Jesus. We share in Jesus’ resurrection life through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-11). This means that the Christian life is not simply about believing in Jesus or living by the teachings



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

- Read John 14:15-17, 25-26. What does this text say about the Holy Spirit?
- The work of Jesus the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit are distinguishable but not separable. Read Item I. D. and explain in your own word what this statement means.
- Read Acts 2:1-36. What does this text say about the Holy Spirit? (In answering this question you might want to review Item II. D.)
- TBC, 8I makes this statement: “God the Holy Spirit is the third Person in the one Being of the Holy Trinity, co-equal with God the Father and God the Son, and equally worthy of our honor and worship”. What does this statement mean?
- Take some time to review the work of the Holy Spirit as presented in Item IV. A. 1-7. Give some examples of how you have seen the Holy Spirit work in your life.