

The Gospel and the Creeds part IV

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. (Nicene Creed c 325AD)

Sometimes referred to as the forgotten member of the trinity, the Holy Spirit makes up an essential part of the “three stranded rope that cannot easily be broken” Ecc 4:12. Separating the strands leads to a less secure faith, and a diminished experience of the life that God has for you.

The Good News First Proclaimed

The beginning of Acts has the disciples being moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News. The essential message that Peter gives is.

“Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

This is not an isolated incident but the key message that the Apostles share (Acts 5:32; 8:15; 10:44; 11:16; 19:2). In Paul’s conversion, Ananias was chosen to go and administer the good news to this “Christian killing” machine. When he meets him these are his words.

“Brother Saul, The Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17).

This experience and the training Paul received in preaching the gospel meant that the Holy Spirit was an essential part of his kerygma (see 2 Co 11:4, Tit 3:5, Rom 5:5, 8:2, 14:17; 1 Co 6:11,19 etc). For Paul, receiving the Holy Spirit was receiving the guarantee that all God’s promises will be fulfilled in and through Christ. (Eph 1:13,14)

The Good News, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Everything Jesus did he did through the Power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1, Ac 10:38) and his promise to his disciples, and all who would believe in their message, was that “if he should go away, he would send the Holy Spirit to them (John 14-16) and they would do greater things (John 14:12). After his resurrection he spoke to his disciples and reminded them of this and told them to wait until they had received this gift before they did anything else and definitely before they embarked on the work he had for them. (Acts 1:4-8)

The Good News of the Holy Spirit

Today, the Holy Spirit is the real Immanuel, God with Us (Isa 7:14). The Disciples experienced God with them in the form of a physical man to talk to and walk with. Christians of the 21st century experience Immanuel, God with us, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and through the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are, literally, “God with skin on” (1 John 4:13).

This is the Good News: God comes to us and makes his home in us (John 14:23). And when Jesus says “I am with you always” (Matt 28:19) and “I will never leave you or forsake you”(Heb 13:5), he is speaking of his role as an advocate for us before the throne of the Father , and the role of the Holy Spirit which is to be in our life forever, both as individuals (1 Cor 6:19) and as the body of Christ or the “catholic church” (1 Co 3:16).

Jesus obedience to death on the Cross has opened the gateway for God to longer deal with people through priests or secondary institutions, but directly with us, his people and he does that by his spirit.

The Good News, God with us.

When the Holy Spirit comes to us

- He will lead us into all truth (John 16:13) and the truth shall set us free (John 8:32)
- He will “partner” with us (John 14:26, Greek parakletos = called alongside) and encourage us (John 14:26ff), comfort us (Acts 9:31), strengthen us (Eph 3:16), embolden us (acts 4:31), empower us (Acts 1:8), enables us to live a life pleasing to God (Gal 5:18) and enable true fellowship with others (Phil 2:1)
- He will bring conviction of Sin and judgement and lead us to right actions (John 16:8)
- He will help us know the things of God (1 Co 2:10)
- He will gives us the words to say when we don’t know what to say (Luke 21:15)
- He will bring us Gifts of power from the Lord that will grant us wisdom, discernment, understanding, healing, language, mercy, leadership etc. (Romans 12, 1 Co 12, Eph 4)

- He will cause the fruit of godliness to spring up within our life giving evidence of his presence. That is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Kindness, Gentleness, Faithfulness and Self control. (Gal 5:22,23)
- He will interpret our prayers and make our needs known to the Father so that the deep spiritual needs we have may be met (Rom 8:26).
- He will receive and enable our worship as a true member of the Godhead (John 4:24)

The Good News yes! But How?

This truth, this comfort, this conviction of sin, this discernment, this boldness comes as we trust God with some of the thoughts we begin to have. As we experience in our body a certain urgency to act in a way that might be unusual to us, but consistent with the Word of God. As our heart seems to beat a little faster as a conviction comes that God is wanting to use us as partners in his work of redemption and reconciliation. Perhaps by sharing our testimony with someone, or praying for them, or cooking them a meal, or visiting them. The Holy Spirit becomes evident as the urge to read our bibles, and to deal with things in a more patient, loving and kind way becomes our norm. His work is shown as verses come to mind from the bible and we begin to understand the things going on about us without knowing how it happened. And we know he is at work when we sense that we have a choice, to do something a little bigger than ourselves, or to settle for a safer option, to exercise faith or trust what we see, to go in through the narrow gate, or take the wide and easy road.

The Good News Sidelined

In Galatians 3:3 Paul reprimands the Church for although having begun in the Holy Spirit, now trying to please God by their own strength. A quick survey of Christianity over the last 2000 years shows an amazingly similar pattern. People and movements beginning in dependence upon God's Spirit, the later formalizing their relationship with Him through rules, regulations and traditions. A pattern that I suggest is repeated in our own life.

Why? We can't rationalise the work of the Spirit, and we can't control Him. The Spirit goes where He wants (John 3:8), seeming to lead people to do "weird things" (Acts 8:39) and even be thought of as crazy (1 Co 14:23). And our experience may have backed this up and so lead us to fearing the Holy Spirit or just trying to avoid him.

But Jesus said "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13). Obviously the Holy Spirit is Good, for he is of God, and God is love (1 Joh 4:8) and his Spirit leads us into love (Rom 15:30) and fills our hearts with love (Rom 5:5).

Some have become "Christians" without receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit, but that is not how it is supposed to be. In Acts 19:2 the Apostles were keen for the believers there to know that the full Gospel includes embracing the Spirit of God. As for them, same with us. It is time to lay aside our fears of God, and his Holy Spirit and to welcome him to take up full residence in our lives, for only then can we ever hope to fulfil the promises which are ours in Christ (2 Cor 1:20) (see also last weeks sermon). For God will not send us an evil spirit but only what is good right and perfect.

To Conclude

The gift of the Holy Spirit is good news! Enough of this trying to make it on your own in this life, God is standing here willing to impart some of Himself right into your life and with that, to bring his power, his love, his strength, his joy, his peace, in fact all those things that we are desperate for, (except of course the fulfilment of our sinful desire for self preservation, personal control, titillation etc.). So if you haven't yet given your life to Christ, all this awaits you. If you are a Christian that has tried to live without him, God awaits for you to unwrap (or reunwrap) his most precious gift.

This is the Gospel, the Good News.

- Repent (ie metanoeo – Change your thinking),
- believe (trust God), and
- receive (it is all yours for free)