

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii

Adult Sunday School

The Apostles' Creed (10)

“Eighth Article - Belief in the Spirit”

- I. Introduction. Review: The last two lessons we devoted to the return of Christ and judgment carried out by Him, summarized in the seventh article of the Apostles' Creed. As with every doctrine of the Scriptures that Christian orthodoxy holds, there has been a lot of ink spilled in the exposition of them over the centuries. We covered the basics, though, and hopefully you grasped and retained most of them. We pointed out that the return of Christ will be unexpected, instantaneous, visible, and a world-wide cataclysmic event. It will engender great joy in the Christian, and great terror in the unbeliever. We didn't go deeply into certain matters, but made mere mention of them; e.g., that the dead in Christ will rise, and will precede those who are living at that time to join Christ in the air as He descends in preparation for the judgment. The living shall all be changed, glorified, Scripture says, in the twinkling of an eye. But we did go into some implications and applications of the promise of His return in a bit more detail. We also studied the judgment of all people that Christ the Judge will carry out. We found that when we speak of judgment, it can be either the “courtroom” scene where the verdict will be proclaimed, or the penalty that the unbelieving and wicked will be cast into and suffer for eternity. Then we considered the qualifications of the Judge, and the basis, nature, and extent of the judgment. Now we begin studying the eighth article of the Apostles' Creed, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”
- II. The Identity of the Holy Spirit. Who and what is He? From the structure of the Apostles' Creed, the evangelical Christian immediately knows that the creed's claim is that He is the Third Person of the Trinity, and that is the Biblical truth. But there are non-evangelical groups out there, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and others, who claim to be Christian but

aren't, who deny the Trinity and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. So let's start with the latter question first,...

A. What is the Holy Spirit? We could answer with the answer to Q. 4 of the Shorter Catechism: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." We would be absolutely correct. But a closer look into Scripture will help us to understand some of the anti-trinitarian arguments against the orthodox position, and will help us disprove their arguments. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit" are the word that in other contexts is translated "breath" or "wind." There is one immediate reminder: context matters! not only for translation, but also for interpretation and understanding. It's interesting that the J.W.'s will sometimes employ the translational matter to argue that the Holy Spirit is therefore an impersonal force. At other times, they will not use any scriptural reasoning to back it up, but will say that He is an impersonal force that is the power of God, like electricity is a force that man uses. Though a different Heb. word for "breath" is used in Gen. 2:7, it does say that when God breathed life into Adam, he became a living soul, in a different way than the animals that God had created. So, that makes it clear that what God figuratively "breathed" into Adam was his soul, his "nephesh," aka his spirit. At the very least, then, we realize that what might be translated and understood in one context as breath or wind can, in another context, be clearly understood to be a living spirit. Another interesting thing is that the J. W.'s, in their own translation of the Bible, the New World Translation, do translate the terms *ruach qodeshi* (Heb.) and *pneuma hagios* (Greek) as "holy spirit." They do not capitalize the term, though, as a reflection of their denial of His deity and personhood. In the OT, the term "Holy Spirit" appears three times. On many, many more occasions, God refers to Him as "My Spirit" or He is referred to as "the Spirit

of Yahweh.” In the NT, of course, He is referred to as the “Holy Spirit,” “the Spirit of God,” or the “Spirit of Christ,” or the “Spirit.” Looking at many of the contexts, it becomes clear by what He does that He is not some impersonal force. It isn’t Jehovah doing what is happening by means of a force or power that He uses. For example, David says, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). Impersonal forces don’t speak, and only God uses men as instruments to bring words forth to other men. Likewise, in Acts 5:3, “But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?” An impersonal force cannot be lied to because it cannot be communicated with. So, what this shows so far is that the Holy Spirit is a living Spirit, not just breath or wind and not an impersonal force. What we have said implies that He is a person, and we have hinted that He is deity by virtue of what He is able to do, and what the contexts in which He appears in Scripture indicate. But to make what is so far implied explicit, let’s answer the second question...

- B. Who Is the Holy Spirit? Consider what the Holy Spirit has done and continues to do that shows His Deity and Personhood. In the OT, the Holy Spirit communicated God’s Word to men as His own word. Eze. 11:5 - “Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and He said to me, “Say, ‘Thus says the LORD, “So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts.””” This is confirmed in the NT by 2 Pet. 1:21 - “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” In Micah 2:1-5, God says that He will bring woe and calamity on His people for the evil they plan and do. Then, Mic. 2:7 says, ““Is it being said, O house of Jacob: ‘Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? Are these His doings?’ Do not My words do good to the one walking uprightly?”” It is an act of the sovereign God alone to bring about events in history, particularly to control

calamities, etc., and this text says that the Holy Spirit does that. In the NT, Matt. 1:18 says that the human nature of Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit; He is, therefore, able to create life. It is an act of the sovereign God alone to create life. Acts 28:25 says, “And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers.” Paul went on to quote Isa. 6:9-10, which clearly came from the mouth of Yahweh (Jehovah), as Isa. 6:3, 4 show. By the inspired word of the NT, the Holy Spirit is equated to Yahweh (Jehovah). So the Holy Spirit is revealed by holy Scripture to be, not just *a* personal god, but *the* personal God, whom Jeremiah says is the only living and true God. (By the way, John 12:41 shows from the same location, Isa. 6, that it was Christ whom Isaiah *saw* on the throne of Yahweh, just as it was the Holy Spirit whom Isaiah *heard* from the throne of Yahweh.) And we can follow that up by directing attention to what is clear from throughout Scripture, if one simply reads carefully and objectively in an accurate translation, that the Holy Spirit not only has the ability to do what only God can do, but He has all of the attributes, or qualities of being, that God has. That’s an entire study in and of itself, and we have done some of that on occasions in the past, such as our study in the Attributes of God. Now it remains to show that He is the Third Person of the Triune God who is three Persons in one God world without end. By calling Him the Third Person and Jesus Christ the Second Person and the Father the First Person, we do not mean that any one is less than the others, nor that there is a subordination in being among them. “...these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory,” as our catechism succinctly puts it. In carrying out their respective ministries, the Son is willingly submissive to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is willingly submissive to the Father and the Son. We

only need to look to one text of Scripture, though there are many, to see that God is the Triune God, and the Holy Spirit is the Third Person: Mt. 28:19 - “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There is only one name, but three Persons. We could also point out texts such as Isa. 48:16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Titus 3:3-7.

III. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit. We don’t want to go into great detail here because this is what the rest of the third section of the Apostles’ Creed is about. However, we can look at this from a more general point of view and save the specifics to study in the following articles.

A. The Sanctifier of His People. If the Father is the Elector of His people, and Christ is the Redeemer of His people, then the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier of His people. There are two aspects of this, just as there are two aspects of sanctification.

1. He sanctifies His people definitively. Definitive sanctification: our understanding of it depends on the basic meaning of the word “sanctify” or “holy.” It means, most fundamentally, to be set apart. Definitive sanctification is the setting apart of an elect person unto God that takes place when he is taken out of the kingdom of darkness and put into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God by union with Christ, in which act regeneration takes place. Then faith is created in the regenerate heart, and through that instrument, God justifies the sinner. Definitive sanctification is the act of the Holy Spirit. As the Executive Agent, so to speak, of the Father’s will and the Son’s saving work, He applies Christ’s work to the heart of an elect sinner in God’s due time. In one sense we could say that this is the result of the effectual call issued by the Holy Spirit using the gospel; in another sense we could say that this *is* the effectual call by the Holy Spirit. We distinguish

between the various elements of the *ordo salutis*, but we can't distinguish their occurrence in time. But the point is that the Holy Spirit irresistibly calls the elect sinner when it is the right time to do so as God eternally decreed. When the Spirit does so, He definitively sets that sinner apart unto God by calling him to Christ and salvation as we have described. We call it definitive because it is the act of God that defines that person as a Christian by setting him apart. It is the act by which and the moment at which the sinner is *re-defined* from his fallen, lost, totally depraved, spiritually dead, unsaved, hopeless condition to his saved condition, justified standing, righteousness-loving newness of life in which he can say, "I was lost, but now I'm found; I was blind, but now I see—amazing grace! that saved a wretch like me! How sweet the sound!"

2. He sanctifies His people progressively. This is what most of us think of when we use the word "sanctification." This addresses the other aspect of sanctification, or the idea of the holy, which is moral purity. As soon as God definitively sanctifies the sinner, He begins to progressively sanctify the sinner. He starts the work of progressively renewing the saved sinner in the whole man after the image of God, enabling him more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. If that sounds familiar, it should; it comes directly from the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 35. But just so we can see how creedal statements are drawn from and express the doctrines of Scripture, and therefore help us to hold fast the confession of our faith, this dynamic is exactly what the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke of in Eph. 2:10. After showing us in vss. 8-9 that grace-through-faith salvation (the whole thing: grace, salvation, and faith itself) is not of

ourselves, but is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast, he then follows that up by saying, “For you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus!—stop right there! There is definitive sanctification, carried out by God the Holy Spirit; *He* created you “in Christ Jesus”—made you a new creature *in Christ*—and there is Paul’s famous theology of union with Christ that plays such a pivotal role in Ephesians, and in our whole understanding of the basis for salvation to be applied to us individually, personally, but also of the basis for the church as the body of Christ! But not only were you created in Christ Jesus to receive this by-grace-through-faith salvation, but there is a further purpose in it: you were created in Christ Jesus “for good works, which God ordained beforehand that you should walk in them.” There is the progressively sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that develops the Christian character in you that produces a Christian life.

- B. The Author and Enlightener of Scripture. 2 Pet. 1:20-21 makes it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who “moved holy men of old” to commit the Word of God to writing for the greater encouragement of the church, etc. If He moved the prophets of the OT to set down the Word of God in writing, then surely He moved the apostles and evangelists of the NT to set down the Word of God in writing. He inspired them to it. That doesn’t mean He just made them feel inspired. It means that He so influenced them, while He also used their faculties, gifts, history, situation, everything that made each of them unique in his place and time, that the words they wrote were, at the same time their words and the Word of God. And it was set down in the original autographs exactly how God wanted it all to be written, not only in the ideas, doctrines, etc. He wanted put down, but in the order and even in the form of the words that appeared. This is the doctrine of Inspiration. God’s Word was not

dictated to them, but was still effectively given to them, and through them. The Holy Spirit then is also the One who enlightens our understanding to the meaning of Scripture—“meaning,” not “meanings.” Every text of Scripture has only one right meaning. Language, and especially the Word of God, must have a discernibly right meaning if it is to have any meaning at all. “The cat is black” cannot mean “the house is on fire”; if it did, everyone in the house would perish. In the same way, Scripture cannot mean something different to one Christian than to another; if it did, we could not know the gospel for sure, and we would all perish. The Holy Spirit who indwells each Christian gives him the ability to understand the Bible in its spiritual sense. This is what it means for us to “spiritually appraise” the things of God in 1 Cor. 2. We have spiritual life and a new mind, new ways of thinking, as part of the new heart we have. The Spirit takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us; He enables us to understand more and more of the Bible as we read it throughout our Christian lives. This spiritual enlightenment by the Spirit is what John referred to in 1 Jn. 2:27 (READ). It doesn’t mean that there is no need for teachers of the Word in the church. God gives those teachers elsewhere in Scripture, so it can’t mean that. It does mean that the Spirit’s enlightening of our understanding to the true gospel keeps us from being deceived, ultimately, by the false gospels out there that deny that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. So much for an overview of the Spirit’s ministry. Put this all together, and He is...

C. The Paraclete.

1. This word may be derived from the Greek word *parakaleo*, which means “I urge,” “I encourage,” as we saw in Eph. 4:1 (cf. my sermon). The Paraclete is One who comes alongside to encourage, comfort, and help. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Paraclete in His function of Helper and Comforter of His

people.

2. The Holy Spirit will be with us and in us forever. That He is in us, i.e., He indwells every Christian, indicates that it is His ministry to sustain our faith, thus preserving us in it so that we persevere in faith to the end. It is His ministry to sanctify us from the heart outward, and in so doing, to conform us to the image of the beloved Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren (and that means the pre-eminent One after whose character the adopted children of God are shaped). That He is with us indicates that it is His ministry to help us in numerous ways through life. He accompanies us, He upholds us with spiritual and even physical endurance through trials, and through our tasks of service to God and His people. He gives us unction in the use of our spiritual gifts, and makes them operative in both the givers and the receivers. He makes the means of grace effectual for our salvation: the Word, sacraments, and prayer.