

The Holy Spirit - Bible Study 1

(Acknowledgment: Some of the material for this Bible study (particularly under the heading 'The Personal Spirit') comes directly from the booklet 'The Holy Spirit' by Korey Maas, in 'The Lutheran Difference' series of Bible Studies, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, © 2002.)

Opening

Leader begins with prayer:

Around the group, take turns in answering one of the following questions:

(if you were present at the Big Issue service)

What was one of the things that surprised, challenged or excited you in what the panel members said about the Holy Spirit?

Or

What was a question you wish you could have asked one of the panel members when they spoke about the Holy Spirit at the Big Issue service?

(if you weren't there on the night)

What is a question that has puzzled you about the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Of whom would you ask this question?

Wrestling with the Word

The Holy Spirit has been described as 'the shy member of the Trinity' and 'the forgotten member of the Trinity.' The Spirit's job is not to point to the Spirit but to Jesus, and through Jesus to bring glory to the Father. So often we are not even aware that the Spirit is at work.

Read John 14:16-18, 25-26.

➤ From this passage, what is it that the Spirit *does*?

Read the **Third Article of the Apostles' Creed** (in bold below)

THE THIRD ARTICLE: SANCTIFICATION

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

As you read this article of the Creed, what stands out to you? Is there anything that seems unusual or unexpected?

Now read Martin Luther's Explanation of the Third Article (found in italics below).

⁶ What does this mean?

Answer: I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.^[1]

- What similarities and differences do you see between the 3rd article and its explanation?
- How does the Holy Spirit work? What are some of the ways mentioned in the article and the explanation?

Faith in Jesus and redemption from sin through his life, death and resurrection is a *gift*. We don't earn it or decide to believe in Jesus by our own efforts (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives to us. And the Spirit works in definite ways, as God has chosen.

The Personal Spirit

Read Psalm 139:7-10 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-13.

- What attributes do these passages ascribe to the Holy Spirit?
- What does this tell you about the nature of the Holy Spirit?

Many people when they hear the word *spirit*, think of an impersonal energy or 'life force.' Read Isaiah 63:10 and Romans 15:30. compare these verses with Acts 13:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 12:11. Rather than an 'impersonal energy,' how does the Bible describe the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not merely 'a part of God' or 'God's energy' but the Holy Spirit is God himself.

Read John 15:26, Matthew 10:20 and Galatians 4:6.

- What do these passages say about the *relationship* of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son, both from eternity and within the Trinity itself?
- What good news or comfort can be found in knowing that the Holy Spirit is not merely a spiritual substance or energy, but a divine person?

How can I know that I have the Holy Spirit?

Many Christians are anxious about the question, 'How can I be sure that I have the Holy Spirit?' Pastor Aldi at the Big Issue service suggested that because the Spirit is a person, a personal being, it's less a question of 'how much I have the Holy Spirit' and more a question of 'how much the Holy Spirit has *me*.' The Spirit, being a Person, can't be owned or controlled in that sense of 'having.' The Spirit must *give himself* and must *come to a person*.

But still, the question is worth looking at. Either ‘how can I be sure I have the Holy Spirit?’ in the sense of having access to the Spirit, or ‘How can I be sure that the Holy Spirit is at work in me?’

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3. This is the beginning of Paul’s great chapters on Spiritual gifts in the First Letter to the Corinthians. Before Paul says anything about what we normally think of as ‘spiritual gifts’ – those unusual and sometimes spooky/supernatural abilities that the Spirit gives – he speaks about the Lordship of Jesus.

- What is the only way possible to confess that Jesus is Lord of your life and the world?
- What does that indicate about the certainty of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Read Acts 2:36-39.

- What are God’s promises in connection with baptism? To whom do these promises apply?

Read John 8:37-39.

- What is Jesus’ promise and assurance about the Holy Spirit? To whom does this apply?

In the light of these verses, how would you answer the question, ‘How can I be sure that I have the Holy Spirit?’ or ‘How can I know that the Holy Spirit is at work in my life?’ (You might also like to refer back to Luther’s explanation of the Second Article of the Creed!)

As you reflect on your personal faith, worship and life, what consolation and encouragement does the adjective *holy*, as applied to God’s Spirit, provide?

The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit links his activity to **God’s Word**. The Spirit opens up God’s word to us so we can grow in faith. Through the Word the Spirit points to Christ. We hear God’s Word when we read the Bible (God’s *written* Word), or when we come to church and hear the sermon (God’s *preached* Word), and both of these point us to God’s *incarnate* Word, Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 10:13-17.

- How does Paul say faith comes to people? What does this mean in your life?

Read Isaiah 55:10-11, John 16:12-15, John 17:17, and Hebrews 4:12.

- Discuss what these passages say about God’s word, and about the work of the Holy Spirit.
- How often do you read or listen to God’s word? Would you like to do it more often? How could this happen, practically?

In what areas of your life would you like the Holy Spirit to be more active?

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer. What is his promise in Luke 11:13? What is it that Jesus is encouraging his disciples to ask *for*?

Conclusion:

Spend some time in prayer. Pray that the Heavenly Father would continue to give you his Holy Spirit so you can continue to be filled with the Spirit. Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, bringing you to faith and making you holy.

Coming up:

Future studies will include examinations of questions like:

How can I continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

What about Spiritual Gifts? Speaking in tongues – prophecy – healing – service - etc

What about the Fruit of the Spirit?

What about Spiritual Warfare?

^[1]Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (345). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.