

The Holy Spirit – given and giving

Text: Matthew 28:19-20

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Scriptures: Genesis 1:1-2; 26-27; Matthew 28:16-20

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 104, 343, 34, 345, 530

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD20)

Theme: The person and work of the Holy Spirit who is given and who gives.

Proposition: Believe in the personal gift of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Apostles Creed starts with the key words “I believe”. This creed is a statement of faith. HCLD20 asks the question: What do you believe concerning “The Holy Spirit?” The Heidelberg Catechism has dealt with person of God the Father in LD8-10 - who is the Father, what does He do, how are we helped? LD11-19 God the Son - who is He, what is His work, what benefits do we receive through His conception, suffering, resurrection, ascension? LD20 God the Holy Spirit. There is a single brief article. I think it would probably be more lengthy if our confession was written today when there are many Pentecostal churches.

There is a pattern in the Heidelberg Catechism when considering God the Father and the Son which is firstly to focus on the objective aspects of faith and then subjective (personal) aspects of faith. Firstly, answering the question “Who is God?” and then “Who are we in Him?” We see this pattern reflected in LD20 focussing on God the Holy Spirit:

- a) First, He, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God.
- b) Second, He has been given to me personally, so that, by true faith, He makes me share in Christ and all His blessings, comforts me, and remains with me forever.

In this sermon, we’re going to consider firstly **the gift** of the Holy Spirit under the heading: “The Person of the Holy Spirit given personally”, then the **gifts given** by the Holy Spirit under the heading “The work of the Holy Spirit giving personally”.

1. The Person of the Holy Spirit given personally

The Old Testament has very little clear presentation of the Holy Spirit as a distinct person e.g. Gen 1:2 “*The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters*”. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force: like the Jing/Jang in Eastern mysticism or the hidden power in Star Wars: “In Him, unusually strong, the Force is”.

The Holy Spirit is a person. A member of the divine Trinity, same in substance, equal in power and glory to both the Father and the Son and yet distinct from them both. We see this first in the ‘divine plural’ when God creates mankind: “*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"*” (Gen 1:26). We see also this in our text: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Matt 28:19)

The Holy Spirit has a name. He is a person. This is clear also from the book of Acts: "*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? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'*" (Acts 5:3-4). Here lying to the Holy Spirit is equated to lying to God.

In John 14:16, Jesus speaks of sending "another Counsellor": Like the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, He is clearly a person. He has the characteristics which only God possesses:

- His Power –e.g. overshadowing of virgin Mary (Luke 1:35)
- His Knowledge of all things (John 14:26)
- His transcendence – He is everywhere present (Ps 139:7-10)
- His eternal nature – He is without beginning or end (Heb 9:14)

The Holy Spirit is God, as Father and Son are God. HCLD20 "*He, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God*". The Holy Spirit is a divine person of infinite majesty, glory, holiness, power. This is clearly evident from Scripture, and yet many simply do not believe this fact e.g. Jehovah's witnesses.

We confess that we believe the Holy Spirit to be a divine person dwelling with us both:

- As a corporate church body – "*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*" (1 Cor 3:16).
- As individual believers - "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*" (1 Cor 6:19)

The Heidelberg Catechism LD20 focusses on the individual: "*He has been given to me personally*".

I am going to speak now about Charismatic/Pentecostal churches. I need to be careful; we need to be careful. Many I have known in such churches know the Bible better than many in our Reformed churches, many live more godly lives than many in our Reformed Churches. I/we need to beware of judging faithful individual Christians in charismatic churches who have been taught error regarding person and work of the Holy Spirit.

With this understood, I now say: Often the Holy Spirit in the minds of many Charismatic/Pentecostal Christians is understood to be more of a force than a person. Those who think of Him an impersonal power may ask "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?" Is there a "second-blessing" to be had so that I can be filled up? "I need more power, more assurance, more confidence to witness". This view may result in despair and despondency because the hoped-for spiritual top-up has not come or in self-exaltation, self-sufficiency and pride; if the belief is that a second blessing has been received.

It can be a little like Simon's attempt to buy spiritual power (Acts 8:9-24). He had a great reputation in Samaria for magic. They said of Him: "*This man is what is called the Great Power of God*". When Simon saw that people received the Holy Spirit through laying on of the Apostle's hands. He wanted the power too and was willing to pay money for it! (That is where the word 'simony' comes from). Peter rebuked him: "*May your silver perish with you, because*

you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” To believe that the Holy Spirit is a “commodity” to be obtained in greater measure is wickedness. It is blasphemy. To ask “how can I get more of the Holy Spirit” is the wrong question.

The right question is “How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?” Think about Paul and Barnabas being commissioned for service: **Acts 13:2** *“And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* The Holy Spirit had more of Barnabas and Paul as they responded to the call to serve Christ.

Do you desire that the Holy Spirit have more of you? Be active in serving the Lord. Now - right here in this part of His Kingdom. In the future – wherever He sends you. He has given you all that you need to serve Christ, which brings us to our second point:

2. The work of the Holy Spirit giving personally

A gift by definition is given, not sold, or lent. The Spirit is the divine 3rd person of the Trinity who is both given and who Himself gives gifts. The Spirit bestows man with the gift of life (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4) and gives new life in Christ (Jn 3:3-8; 2 Cor 3:6; Titus 3:5). He has a “background role” in the redemptive work of God. He points to Christ who is “centre-stage” in Scripture. The focus of the church must therefore be on Christ, not on the Holy Spirit. Not because the Holy Spirit is less as divine God, but because His role is different to the role of the Father and the role of the Son.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to “make me share in Christ and all His blessings”. The Holy Spirit applies the redeeming work of Christ to us by faith. The Spirit of God acts in ways which indicate a personality: He searches, teaches, comforts, convinces, speaks, sends (Gen 1:2; Luke 12:12; John 15:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 10:19-20); The Spirit convicts men and women of sin, leading to repentance: John 16:7-11. The Spirit pours love for God into our hearts – Rom 5:5; Eze 11:19. The Spirit enables us to confess Christ as our Lord and Saviour: 1 Cor 12:3. He guided the prophets (2 Pet 1:21) and the authors of the New Testament (1 Cor 2:13).

He also provides illumination for us in the hearing and reading of God’s Word (1 Corinthians 2:9-13): *“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.” For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God... the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God”.*

The Spirit, God’s personal gift of a Himself to each believer, comforts the disciple of Christ by revealing the truth to us that God loves us and by testifying with our spirit that we are truly God’s children *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16).*

The Spirit’s work is to grow us in holiness. We are called to active cooperation with Him in His work. We teach others as the Spirit teaches us the way of Christ, as Jesus said: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:19).*

We are not merely to wait passively for people to come to us, but we are to actively seek to make disciples as we go about the activities of our lives. It is important then that we commit ourselves to relationships with sinners both inside and outside the covenant community. Jesus was intimate with sinners: he ate with them.

The divine person of the Holy Spirit is the key to vital personal religion through His eternal presence in the believer. In this is both the reality and the confirmation of the promise of Christ to His disciples: Matt 28:20 *“lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*. Once given, the Spirit is not removed from a person’s life. Our Catechism clearly states this truth *“He remains with me forever”*.

Sadly, the Holy Spirit, in the minds of some conservative Christians, seems to be little more than a vague semi-divine cosmological power, not a divine person resident within the church as a whole body and the believer as an individual. This unbiblical understanding often leads to an almost sterile Christian ‘life’ where there is little warmth of love for Lord, little evidence of the fruits of joy, peace, patience, kindness. Little desire to join with Jesus in His mission to seek and to save the lost. This faulty view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit tends to bring deadness and a lack of both assurance and zeal for the Lord.

Here is a question for us all *“Does the way I live my Christian life reflect my stated belief in the power, knowledge, and continuous presence of the Holy Spirit who has been given to me and who gives to me”?*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ: believe that the Holy Spirit has been given by God to you. Know that you share in the benefits of Christ. Be comforted by the presence of the third person of the Trinity dwelling in you. He will not leave you. He is the permanent gift who really does keep on giving!

AMEN.