House Church

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**The Holy Spirit and the Christian’s Life**

**Experiencing God in Everyday Life**

“You will know the Spirit, for He lives among you and within you.” John 14:17

**1. Introduction: Making Sense of the Trinity and the Relationship of the Spirit to the Father and Son**

* What is the doctrine of the Trinity?

*“God is One, but God is three coeternal (existing from the beginning and forever), consubstantial (made of the same substance, of which only they are made) hypostases (beings): Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”*

* What does this mean??????

 

* Where do we find this in the Bible?
	+ Nowhere. No Christian in the first 300 years of the church was a trinitarian. There was continuous debate about the nature of God and the relationship of Jesus to God, and hardly any discussion about the Spirit.
	+ The New Testament provides a foundation for the Trinity doctrine, speaking of God as Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of God, plus numerous other images (Logos, Sophia/Wisdom, Shepherd, Living Water, Creator, King, Alpha and Omega, etc.), but in the Bible there is nothing close to the formal theological doctrine that emerged at the end of the fourth century (375 AD).
* How did the Church Fathers come to this conclusion? Why is the Trinity so hard to understand?
	+ Significant movement away from Judaism as a foundation for understanding Jesus and the early Christian writings, toward Gnostic or Greek Platonic Philosophy.
		- Rejection of Christianity by Judaism: Council of Jamina (125 AD).
		- Marcion (85-160 AD): Developed a very significant brand of Christianity devoid of anything Jewish. Believed in two Gods: (1) Old Testament “Yahweh” God, who was evil; (2) Jesus’ “Father” God, who was good). Developed the first Canon of the NT. The suppression of Marcionites and other “unorthodox” views by more “orthodox” Christians led to tremendous 150-year debate within the early church about the nature of God, the nature of Jesus, the relationship between Jesus and God, and the Canon of the NT.
	+ Arias, Bishop of Alexandria, (256-336 AD) maintained that Jesus was subordinate to the Father. A major church fight broke out between Arias and Athanasius on the issue: “Is the Son subordinate to the Father or are Son and the Father made of the same substance and therefore equal? Athanasius wins the debate and the issue is settled at the Council of Nicaea (Nicaean Creed, 325 AD); Arias is excommunicated as a heretic. Only 50 years later was the Holy Spirit deemed to be God in the same way that the Son and the Father are in the Nicaean Creed (Basil of Caesarea, 374 AD: "We perceive the operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one and the same, in no respect showing differences or variation; from this identity of operation we necessarily infer the unity of nature”).
	+ The doctrine of the Trinity was never approved by any early Church Council. It is mentioned/assumed at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD) as a baptismal formula, but not discussed or officially approved.
* Is there a better way, a more Biblical way to talk about God?
	+ It’s hard for us to understand the Trinity, because we no longer think the way the first Greek Christians did. If you are a married woman with children, are you a mother because you have the substance or essence of “motherness,” which exists perfectly in heaven, and joins and defines all mothers? Or is your identity as a mother formed by how you act as a mother toward your children—how you function, by what you do as a mother, by how you are experienced by your children? If you adopt the second view, a woman can simultaneously be a mother, a daughter, a wife, a CEO, or a golfer—that is, one person, who is experienced in different ways by the people who know her, all unified and defined by her character, her integrity.
	+ This is how the Jews and first Jewish Christians understood God. The fact that the first Greek Christians separated from their Jewish roots early in the history of the Church is important for the development of the Church, but this move produced some doctrine that exists until today that many biblical scholars consider inconsistent with the New Testament.
	+ The Jews thought “functionally.” Something or someone gets an identity not by analyzing what it or they are made of, but by observing how it or he/she works or functions. Since God was holy and indescribable, and since Jews were not allowed to define God or even mention God’s name (anything that limited God was blasphemy), metaphor was essential to understanding God. God is like cool water, like an eagle, like a mother’s womb, like a rock, like a King, like fire, like wisdom, like a spoken word, like a Father, like a Son, like the wind (the Hebrew word for “Spirit” literally means “breath” or “wind”).
	+ We are monotheists. We believe in one God. As Christians, we might say that this one, single God functions in three ways, or that we organize all of God’s activity under these three names:
		- Like a **Father**, God creates and sustains the universe, ruling, judging, loving, directing.
		- Like a **Son**, God reveals to us who the Father is, modeling the Father’s love, communicating what the Father wants for us, and making the Father accessible for us. This Son on earth was Jesus, “Emmanuel, God with us.” God’s Spirit calls Jesus a “One-of-a-Kind” Son of God at his baptism (monogenes, “only begotten” is literally “one-of-a-kind” in the Greek).
		- Like a **Spirit** (the wind or breath), God is invisibly present in us and around us, animating and directing life, comforting us, teaching us, inspiring and motivating our power helping us mature in our Christian Faith and increase our ability to love.
	+ Is God literally a Father, a Son, a Spirit? Or are these metaphors given to us to help us in our finitude understand and relate to a God who is far beyond our ability to comprehend and describe?
* Like the early Church Fathers, we spend a lot of time speaking and thinking about God the Father and Jesus. Why do we spend so little time talking about the role of the Spirit in our lives, when it might be the most important aspect of God for Christians to understand?

**2. What is the role of the Spirit? What is God as Spirit doing? How can we recognize God in our ordinary everyday lives?**

*The Spirit is God’s way of being with us, of loving us, empowering us, comforting us, guiding and perfecting us as we work with and for God to transform the world.*

* The Spirit of God ***re-presents Jesus to us***, bridging the gap between the “then and there” and the “here and now.” The Spirit is intimately related to Jesus, our way of knowing Jesus today. As Jesus Christ was in the world, now the Spirit is God’s way of being in the world and being in you today.
	+ John 14:17: “You will know the Spirit, for He lives among you and within you.”
	+ John Calvin: “As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has done and suffered for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us.” The Spirit makes Christ relevant for us. Jesus is not just an interesting historical figure, but through the Spirit of Christ in us, we are transformed and become agents of transformation.
	+ Whenever you see things that Jesus would have done, now done in our world, either by you or by others, you are experiencing the work of God as Spirit (where there is creativity and innovation, where there is love, where there is forgiveness, where there is teaching and learning, where there is acceptance of those who are unacceptable, where there is healing, where there is encouragement and comfort, where there is service and self-sacrifice for the good of others, where there is prayer, there is God’s Spirit).
	+ Without the Spirit, there would be no church, there would be no Bible, there would be no Christians.
* The Spirit of God ***creates new life***. The Spirit was active in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2). Without the Spirit the universe would not exist. As we were all created in the image of God, the creative power in each of us is evidence of the presence of God’s Spirit in us.
	+ 1 Corinthians 15:45: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam (Jesus), is a life-giving Spirit.”
	+ This Spirit is evident whenever we see new life come into the world (with every birth); with every breath that allows our lives to continue.
	+ The Spirit is evident in the working of the laws of nature and the universe that continuously allows us to survive and thrive. If God ceased to exist, so would the universe that God continuously sustains.
	+ The Spirit is evident in the transformations of life of those who were once trapped in debilitating, self-destructive ways of living (self-centeredness, addictions, illness) and were freed into new life with God and with others. The Spirit offers assurance of forgiveness of sins (Psalm 51:10-12); the Spirit of God restores hope (Joel 2:28-29).
	+ The Spirit is at work in the experience of renewal we are able to feel when experiencing nature, during times of leisure and rest, or through loving relationships, or support from others.
	+ The Spirit is evident where we work as co-workers with God in the renewal of life (healing, teaching, counseling, friendship, encouragement, etc.).
* The work of the Spirit of God brings ***freedom*** for new and abundant life in communion with God and others.
	+ 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” This activity is the continuation of the work of Jesus Christ: Galatians 5:1, “For freedom, Christ has set us free.”
	+ Wherever people are liberated from bondage or oppression, the Spirit is at work. Wherever we resist injustice and work to set people free, we participate in this work of God, through the power of the Spirit of God in us.
	+ The Spirit frees us from the burden and anxiety of law-keeping and perfectionism.
	+ The Spirit motivates the evangelistic mission of the Church, to spread the good news of what God has done for all humanity in Jesus Christ.
	+ Romans 8:21 tells us that “even the creation groans and longs to participate in the freedom of the children of God.” Whenever we work to sustain and improve this planet that God gave us, we reflect the work of God’s Spirit in us.
* The work of the Spirit of God is ***communal***. God’s spirit ties us to each other.
	+ In the Spirit we are members of one body, we belong to each other and are dependent on each other (1 Corinthians 12). We are brothers and sisters in Christ, we experience each other as brothers and sisters through the love inspired by God’s Spirit.
	+ The bonds and commitments of love, friendship, marriage, parenting, family, country and community are generated by and evidence of God’s Spirit. I believe this is true for Christians and non-Christians. God is love, apart from God there is no love. Every act contrary to self-centeredness is motivated by God’s Spirit in the world.
	+ Even more the Spirit creates community where there once were inseparable barriers (Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all are one”). Wherever we see peace created or reconciliation there is God’s Spirit.
* The Spirit makes God ***universally present***. God is omnipresent through the Spirit.
	+ Psalm 139. “Where shall I escape your Spirit?” Through the Spirit, God is all-knowing (omniscient) and everywhere present (omnipresent). Even when we feel like we are in “hell,” God’s Spirit is present.
	+ How can God simultaneously hear the prayers of every human? God’s Spirit continuously searches our hearts, and even when we are not praying or do not know how to pray, in ways that are “too deeps for words,” the Spirit communes and intercedes for us with God (Romans 7:26-28).
* The Spirit of God ***generates hope***. The Spirit is said to be the “firstfruits” (Romans 8:23) or the “first installment” or “promise” (2 Corinthians 1:22) of what God is bringing about. The Spirit can give us the vision of a positive future, whether here on earth or after we die.
	+ The Spirit awakens hope, yearning and restlessness for a better future. The Spirit is present wherever there is vision, strategy, planning to bring about a better world, a better business, a better family or a better life.
	+ Where there is no vision or hope, no discontent or protest against injustice or evil, the Spirit of God is absent.
	+ The Spirit hears and answers our prayers for what we want, that are in line with God’s purpose and will for us (“Ask and you will receive”).
* The Spirit of God gives us ***“spiritual gifts”*** or abilities that sustain us through difficult times and empower us to love, work and encourage mutual dependence and support (1 Corinthians 12-14).
	+ The Apostle Paul describes the “fruits of the Spirit” as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5).
	+ The primary criterion of life in the Spirit is love of God and a corresponding love of others.
* ***The Holy Spirit and Christian Life***. Through the Spirit we become and mature as Christians.
	+ **Justification.** At the beginning of our Christian life with God, through motivation of the Spirit, someone told us that we are accepted by God as we are, about the grace and love of God, about the work of Jesus for us, about the forgiveness of sins, about abundant life, and about the choice we could make to accept this. The Spirit brought that person to us and inspired, motivated and convinced us to believe this and by faith, simply rest in it. The Spirit of God initiates, inspires and concludes the process through which we become Christians.
	+ **Sanctification**. Then through the influence of the Spirit in our lives, we mature in our faith. It’s not necessarily that we become morally flawless or “other-worldly,” rather the freedom that the Spirit gives us allows us to tell the truth about ourselves, face our flaws and sins and learn to overcome them, even though we know that we seldom do this perfectly. The marks of Christian maturity guided by the Spirit include:
		- Increasingly having our lives shaped and normed by the Word of God. Opening ourselves up to the Bible’s formative influences and becoming ready to take on the responsibilities that come with learning what it means to be a Christian.
		- Maturing in prayer—the concrete expression of our love for God. Learning that we can call upon God as one would call upon a strong mother or father or a close friend.
		- Maturing in freedom. The power of the Spirit does not work like a steamroller—it does not crush a person with an unbearable weight. Rather the Christian is increasingly empowered to live in the service of God and others.
		- Maturing in love for others.
		- Maturing in thankfulness and joy.
	+ **Vocation.** Finally, through the work of the Spirit, as the Christian matures, she/he discovers a vocation, a partnering with God in the mending of creation and in the healing of others, through a life of service. We come to understand our mission, why we exist in the world, and live it out personally, in our marriage and family, vocationally, as citizens and as care-takers of God’s world.