

The Apostles' Creed: I believe in the Holy Spirit (13)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord

*Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell*

The third day He rose again from the dead

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty

He will come again to judge the living and the dead

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The holy catholic Church; the communion of saints

The forgiveness of sins

The resurrection of the body

And the life everlasting

- Having finished the “core” section of the Apostles’ Creed—concerning the person and work of Christ—in this study we begin the final section—sometimes called the “third article” of the Creed—which concerns the person and work of the Holy Spirit.¹
- This final section, focusing on the Holy Spirit, reminds us that the whole Creed—indeed the whole Christian Faith—is Trinitarian. Therefore, this current study of the Apostles’ Creed (and hopefully a more constant familiarity with it in the life of our congregations) should aid us in developing and living a much more self-consciously Trinitarian Christianity that should be manifested in the way that we worship, work, witness, and walk by faith. This is a particularly needful deepening of our faith that the Protestant Churches in the West need to recover if we wish to be truly biblical and God-honoring.² Indeed, the Holy Spirit and His work, in relation to your faith, is so essential that it is not an understatement to assert that without Him, no one could be saved.
- **The Personhood of the Holy Spirit**—One of the elemental truths that needs to be established when it comes to our thinking about the Holy Spirit is that He is actually a person. This means that He is not just a “force” or an “it” but a Divine Being capable of personal relationships and interaction. Dr. Cornelis Venema summarizes well, the clear, Scriptural teaching concerning the personhood of the Holy Spirit as follows:

There are several ways in which the Scriptures underscore the personhood of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel of John, He is frequently designated the “Comforter” (John 14:16, 25; 15:26; 16:7), the One who comes to be our helper and advocate. Only a Person answers this designation and the role it reflects. For this reason, the masculine pronoun is often employed to refer to the Comforter (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13-14).³ Furthermore, when the Spirit’s presence and work is described, the Spirit is said to hear, speak, witness, convince, glorify, lead, give help, and intercede for believers (compare John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 2:4; 8:29; 13:2; 16:6; Rom. 8:14, 16, 26-27; Gal. 4:6; 5:17-18). The Spirit is One to whom we may lie or whom we may grieve (Acts 5:3-4; Eph. 4:30). None of these references can be understood, unless the personhood of the Spirit is presupposed.

Likewise, the Scriptures often testify to the deity of the Spirit. It is no accident, for example, that the Spirit is commonly termed the “holy” Spirit, for He shares in the holiness, the set-apartness, of God Himself. The Trinitarian name of God into which believers are baptized parallels the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19). When the redemptive work of God is summarily describe, the Spirit is often included with the Father and the Son as the Author of our redemption (compare 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3-13; 2:18; 3:14-19; 4:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:2). To lie against the Spirit is tantamount to lying against God (Acts 5:3-4). And to be indwelt by the Spirit is the same as being indwelt by God Himself (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2). God Himself, in the person of His Holy Spirit, is present whenever and wherever the Spirit is present.⁴

- Therefore, like all other areas of our Christian lives, how we speak about the Holy Spirit is very

¹ The sections of the Apostles’ Creed are determined and demarcated by the phrase “I believe...” (or the single word *credo* in Latin) right before each of the members of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

² For proof of this assertion, simply ask a fellow Christian—or even yourself—Why is Trinitarianism essential to the Christian Faith? What difference to your faith and life and worship does the doctrine and truth of the Trinity make?

³ “The use of the masculine pronoun is especially remarkable, since the New Testament word for the Spirit is a neuter noun.” Venema, *What We Believe*, fn. 36, p. 103.

⁴ Venema, *What We Believe*, p. 103.

important.⁵ If we get lazy and speak of *Him* as an “It”, we undermine the biblical teaching that He is a person (see footnote 3 above), and we take on the language that is expressive of heresies such as the ancient Arians or the modern day Jehovah’s Witnesses who both denied the personhood of the Holy Spirit and thus could not, or cannot, confess their faith in the form of the Apostles’ Creed.

- **The Personal Work of the Holy Spirit**—But, more than simply affirming the personhood of the Holy Spirit, it is His work that is of utmost importance to our faith. We owe our very existence to the Holy Spirit, for He was the active agent in creation and is the agent of providence, *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life* (Job 33:4; cf. Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Ps. 33:6-7; Job 26:13). And we owe our very salvation to Him, for without His active work of regeneration and application, the Father’s election and the Son’s work of redemption would be of no benefit to us.
- It is common in the history of theology—and it is right—to think about the work of the Holy Spirit in the terms of “perfecting” or “executing” the work of God. Thus, concerning salvation, the Father determines a certain action (the salvation of His elect), the Son acts, and by that act, secures, that the Father’s will is accomplished (in His person He accomplishes the redemption necessary for the elects’ salvation), and then, the Holy Spirit brings it all into actuality and perfects it unto completion (He regenerates the elect sinner, grants faith and repentance, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies, bringing God’s whole plan of salvation to completion). In other words, the Father **allocates**, the Son **accomplishes**, and the Spirit **applies** the grace of salvation to the elect.
- And it is far more than merely a onetime, singular act of regeneration (what we call being born again) that the Holy Spirit effects for us, but His work includes (among much more that we could say) having guided and inspired the chosen men of old to write the Scriptures which are the revelation of God and His salvation for sinners in Christ (2 Tim. 3:16), empowering preachers to proclaim the Word effectually so that faith can come (1 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 10:14-17), producing fruit in the lives of saints such as love for one another, patience, and good works so that sinners can see by the deeds of the saints that the Gospel being preached is true (cf. Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 2:12, 19-20; John 13:35; Matt. 5:16), convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), granting the new birth (John 3:6-8; Tit. 3:5), effecting the adoption of saved sinners into the family of God (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6), sanctifying the people of God (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2), sealing and securing the saints (Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:5) so that they have the an unshakable hope in the love of God and their eternal salvation (Rom. 5:5; 15:13; Gal. 5:5). Indeed, we could go on and on speaking of the works of the Holy Spirit for He is the main person of the Godhead that we immediately interact with now that Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father.
- **The Procession of the Holy Spirit**—Finally, we want to make a comment concerning what is called the procession of the Holy Spirit. The entire Christian Church split in half in 1054 A.D. over an issue called (in Latin) the *filioque* (which literally means “and the Son”).⁶ The issue at stake was whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, or, from both the Father and the Son. Again, Dr. Venema succinctly articulates the importance of this issue and the necessity of the *filioque* language:

...it expresses well the biblical teaching that the Spirit may never be isolated in His person and work from either the Father or the Son (compare John 15:26; 14:16; 16:7; 20:22; Acts 1:4, 8). The Holy Spirit works to bring us into fellowship with the Father *through* the Son. Indeed, the Holy Spirit’s work is to glorify the Son and enable us to come to the Father through Him. This language of the “procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son,” therefore, provides a safeguard against any view of the Spirit which would allow for a fellowship with God the Father apart from the Son or find the Spirit present where the Son is neither known nor worshipped. The procession of the Spirit from the Father “and the Son” excludes any teaching that there is a general working of the Spirit apart from the Son from whom He also proceeds.⁷

- It is no wonder that there are significant strains of universalism (that all men will ultimately be saved) in Eastern Orthodoxy. They are open (at the Creedal level by their rejection of the *filioque*) to men having a relationship with God through the Spirit, apart from the Son...the *filioque* closes that door.

⁵ For instance, if we pray to the *Father*, but then end our prayers with, “In Your Name”, we not only pray contrary to how Jesus taught us to ask in *His* name (John 16:23-24), but we subtly speak in terms originating in the ancient heresy called “Modalism” which denied the distinction of the persons of the Trinity.

⁶ In 589 A.D. the Council of Toledo added the phrase, “and the Son,” to the Nicene Creed. The Eastern Church rejected this addition, but the Western Church has always accepted this addition. Therefore, after about 400 years of debate (and on the grounds of some other controversies), in 1054 the Church split (called “the Great Schism”), forming the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and these two branches have never come back together again.

⁷ Venema, p. 104