



THEOLOGY
for the PEOPLE of GOD

THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Conclusion

This volume on pneumatology has developed, in the first half, a biblical theology of the Holy Spirit and, in the second half, a systematic theology (with some attention to a historical theology) of the Holy Spirit. He who inspired the biblical writers has revealed progressively his person, presence, power, work, and mission. This development is traced canonically through the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Wisdom Books, the Prophetic Books, the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline Epistles, the General Epistles, and Revelation. As the divine Third Person in intratrinitarian relations with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit reveals his trinitarian mission in relationship to creation and providence, Scripture, angelic beings, human beings, human sin, Christ, salvation, the church, and the future. Among the central themes of this revelation are the Spirit's mediation of the divine presence, his speaking of truth, his impartation of both created life and recreated life, his empowerment and uniting of the people

of God, and his fostering of renewal and holiness that leads ultimately to eschatological perfection. Wherever and whenever the Spirit is poured out, those whom he fills experience a revitalization that leads to thanksgiving and mission, to the glory of God and the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

We bring our work to a conclusion with several matters of personal and pastoral application to life and ministry. Each discussion will begin with questions for reflection (for an individual and for a church) followed by applications derived from our pneumatology.

Worshipping, Honoring, and Praying to the Holy Spirit

Are you reluctant to worship the Holy Spirit? If yes, what may account for this hesitancy? If no, how do you express that worship?

How do you honor the Holy Spirit moment by moment in your life?

Do you pray to the Holy Spirit? If no, for what reason(s) do you not pray to him? If yes, for what matters do you pray to the Spirit?

With the affirmation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the church has historically confessed, “We believe in the Holy Spirit . . . who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.” We acknowl-

edge the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit and his coequality with the other persons of the Trinity as to nature, power, and will. Moreover, the Spirit's eternal procession from both the Father and the Son, together with his names of "Love" and "Gift," highlight the co-eminence of the Spirit in relation to the other two persons. He is God the Holy Spirit, and this truth compels us to adore and honor him together with the Father and the Son.

Concretely, then, church worship services direct praise and thanksgiving to the triune God in prayer and song and responsive readings, expressing honor to the Spirit for his appropriated works of creation/re-creation/perfection. At particular junctures in the liturgy, the Spirit's presence and power are invoked: to unite us in one mind and heart as we worship; to convict us of sin, and to assure us of the Spirit's application of forgiveness; to illumine Scripture as it is read and preached, and to prompt us to trust and obey; to bring blessing and sanctification as new believers are baptized and we celebrate the Lord's Supper; and to direct and empower us as we enter into our mission field of the world.

Personally, as we engage with the Holy Spirit, we honor him moment by moment with our love, trust, obedience, and dependence. These activities by which we revere the Spirit are not different in essence from those same activities of adoration directed toward the Father and the Son. For example, we do not trust the

Father, love the Son, and obey the Holy Spirit differently than we trust, love, or obey the other two persons. Indeed, the Holy Spirit as “Love” is the one through whom “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts” (Rom 5:5). We cannot know the divine love apart from the outpoured Holy Spirit. Additionally, the Spirit as “Gift” is the highest of the “good gifts” whom the heavenly Father gives us. In turn, our hearts should overflow with joy and thanksgiving for God’s wonderful favor—the Spirit himself!

So we may pray to the Holy Spirit. Because he is God and engages in appropriated works (inseparably with the Father and the Son), we may direct specific prayers for his particular attention. This is not different from prayer involving the other two persons. For example, following the way Jesus taught us to pray, we may address “Our Father,” i.e., the First Person. Specifically, we may address our prayers to the Father through the Son “in Jesus’s name.” Also, we may at times choose to address the Spirit directly in prayer as the Third Person of the triune Godhead: “Spirit, help me speak the gospel clearly to my neighbor”; “Spirit, transform me into the image of Christ.” On balance, it would probably be most appropriate to address our prayers primarily to the Father through Jesus while occasionally choosing to pray directly to the Spirit.

Relying on the Illumination of the Holy Spirit to Grasp Divine Revelation

How do you understand the interface of the Spirit of God with the Word of God?

Do you rely on the Holy Spirit as you read, study, and meditate on the Bible? If yes, how do you express that dependence? If no, how may your lack of dependence affect your interpretation and application of Scripture?

The Holy Spirit is the one who is responsible for the inspiration, or God-breathed quality, of Scripture. Written by human authors, it is the Word of God because of the Spirit's speaking in and through those writers. Moreover, because he is the Spirit of truth, the Word that he inspired is wholly true (inerrant) in all that it affirms. We have the privilege of trusting all Scripture because all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore true. In our day, as it seems a growing number of Christians are drifting away from the truthfulness of the Bible, we who rely on the Spirit of God's interface with the Word of God may possess great confidence in divine revelation.

Such dependence is expressed by giving heed to the Spirit's work of illumination. Not only did he inspire Scripture as it was being written in the past; he also illumines Scripture as it is being read and studied in the present. This work of the Spirit is essential for a proper

interpretation of the Bible. Some people (mis)understand this illumination to mean that they just sit down with their Bible in hand, ask the Spirit to help them grasp what it means (to them), and almost magically they get it. This naive approach, while quite common, overlooks the fact that the Spirit prompted Scripture to be written with an overarching focus—Christ is the theme from beginning to end—and in different genres—narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, letter—that demand to be read according to different rules of interpretation. Seeking to understand the Bible without a basic grasp of these interpretive principles, even when relying on the Spirit’s illumination, may be a recipe for disaster!¹

Rather, reading the Bible in accordance with good interpretive skills and in line with “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.10) brings great blessing. Such a reading of Scripture may begin with a prayer for illumination by the Holy Spirit. Again, Huldrych Zwingli provides an exemplary prayer: “Almighty, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, open and illuminate our minds, that we may purely and perfectly understand your Word and that our lives may be conformed to what we have rightly understood, that in nothing we may be displeasing unto your majesty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”² This prayer asks for the Spirit’s help both in properly understanding the meaning of Scripture and in enacting its rightly

understood meaning, whether that is obedience to a command, trust in a promise, confession of sin, praising God, and the like.

Giving Thanks to the Holy Spirit for the Application of Redemption (Re-Creation)

Do you give thanks to the Holy Spirit for his work in applying the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ? For what particular acts do you give thanks to him?

From the beginning to the end of our salvation, the Holy Spirit is at work (inseparably with the Father and the Son). Even before we embraced the gospel, the Spirit convicted us of our sin, (self-)righteousness, and (worldly) judgment. His divine disturbance prompted us toward repentance and faith, evangelical virtues stimulated by the Spirit himself, who also united us with Christ for the reception of all the benefits of salvation. Through that Spirit-prompted faith, we were justified, declared not guilty but righteous instead. The Spirit regenerated us, removing our own nature/identity and imparting a new nature/identity that loves God and others. By means of the Spirit of adoption, we acknowledge God as our heavenly Father as we share sonship with his Son. This covenantal relationship is sealed, being guaranteed by the Spirit who is the down payment and firstfruit, and who bears witness with our spirit that we truly belong to God in Christ forever. Christ himself bap-

tizes us with the Spirit, incorporating us into his body, the community of faith in which we live and flourish, united and gifted by the Spirit. As the perfecter of God's purposes, the Spirit is the ground for, and the initiator of, our sanctification, which includes our human activity in growing in Christian maturity. The final work of personal perfection will be our resurrection, as the Spirit transforms our lowly bodies into glorified bodies. Then, we will live forever in the new heaven and new earth, the final and eternal state of blessedness in the presence of the triune God.

By his re-creating work, the Holy Spirit effects salvation. To him we offer our thanksgiving for a work well done.

Keeping in Step with the Holy Spirit

What does being filled with/walking in Holy Spirit look like concretely in your life? What are the biggest obstacles to your keeping in step with the Holy Spirit? What concrete plan can you develop to overcome these obstacles so as to live more consistently in the Holy Spirit (remember: doing more is not necessarily a good plan)?

It could be advised that the very first action in which we should engage as we tumble out of bed each morning is to cry out "Spirit, direct my steps today!" Such a biblically sound prayer guarantees nothing

about the circumstances, personal interactions, trials, temptations, heartaches, and joys that will come our way during the day. But as we utter it, we put ourselves into the proper posture with which to start out our day, a posture of dependence upon the one who indwells, guides, and empowers us. Such yieldedness is the right response to the ongoing command “be filled by [i.e., controlled by] the Spirit” (Eph 5:18), an imperative that demands a moment-by-moment reliance on God the Holy Spirit.

Our biggest obstacle to a consistent walk with the Spirit is our own sinful heart (“the flesh”). “For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don’t do what you want” (Gal 5:17). Though not our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ, our old self rears its ugly head as we yield to it and give expression to anger and bitterness, pride and lust, idolatry and greed, self-loathing and lovelessness, and more. “I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). This “Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, God honoring” identity, which is our true, new self, focuses more and more on what pleases the Lord and resists—puts to death—all that is opposed to his will and way.

In terms of concrete plans to actualize this reality, our thoughts often go to specific activities in which we plan to engage: more Bible reading and memorization,

more prayer, more evangelism, more fasting, and the like. All of these ideas are certainly welcome! But for most of us, one of the biggest obstacles to keeping in step with the Spirit isn't a lack of spiritual intake; rather, we suffer from a lack of focus on the simple matter of trusting and obeying the Spirit as he leads. For this we need time and concentration, which may look like withdrawal from the frenetic pace of life, work, family, church, responsibilities, busyness, and more. What if our concrete plan would be to establish regular rhythms of "spiritual breathing": crying "Spirit, direct my steps today" as we tumble out of bed, listening to the voice of the Spirit as we meditate on Scripture, checking for sins to confess, creating margins for divine appointments arranged by the Spirit, voicing simple phrases like "Spirit, I adore you" and "Spirit, thank you," praying for the Spirit's guidance, obeying him when he directs us, and the like? While this may appear to be just another list of things to do, these rhythms are actually expressions of a lifestyle that flows from walking with the Holy Spirit moment by moment. And it is to this Spirit-filled lifestyle that we are called: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

Being Guided by the Holy Spirit

Do you seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit? If no, what may account for this hesitancy? If yes, how do you con-

cretely seek his direction?

Are you aware of, and dependent on, the Holy Spirit as the one to whom our good works are to be ascribed?

If someone comes up to you claiming that the Spirit has given her clear direction to embark on a particular course of action, how would you discern if this guidance is indeed from the Spirit?

As we make much of keeping in step with the Spirit, we need reminding of what the Spirit's guidance consists: he leads in both moral matters involving good works and personal direction.

As to the first, the Holy Spirit operates good works through our life: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22–23). While often viewed as personal Christlike characteristics—which they certainly are—these attitudes and actions are expressed in community; thus, they are relational good works: Christians do good to other Christians. Scripture calls us to many other types of good works: evangelistic engagement with nonbelievers, merciful care for widows and orphans, selfless bearing of one another's burdens, Spirit-empowered employment of our spiritual gifts, and much more.

An ancient confession of faith reminds us "to whom good works are to be ascribed, and how they are necessary":

But since they who are the children of God are led by the Spirit of God, rather than that they act themselves (Rom. 8:14), and “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Rom 11:36), whatsoever things we do well and holily are to be ascribed to none other than to this one only Spirit, the Giver of all virtues. However it be, he does not compel us, but leads us, being willing, working in us both to will and to do (Phil 2:13). Hence Augustine writes wisely that God rewards his own works in us. By this we are so far from rejecting good works that we utterly deny that anyone can be saved unless by Christ’s Spirit he be brought thus far, that there be in him no lack of good works, for which God has created him.³

Accordingly, as we are guided by the Holy Spirit, we will engage—and must engage—in good works. This claim about the moral guidance of the Spirit is not controversial.

As for personal guidance, which for some is a controversial matter, our pneumatology maintains that the Spirit sets the course for us by giving specific direction concerning the how, when, where, and whom of vocation, marriage or singleness, family, ministry, and more. We expect and long for such personal guidance as we live in the age of the Spirit. Such divine direction does not have to be dramatic or of a miraculous nature,

though it may be. Rather, we expect and depend on the Spirit to guide through the most mundane matters of life.

Of chief concern is how we are to discern whether it is the Spirit who is directing a particular course of action or if such an idea is simply the product of one's imagination—or worse. Importantly, we must be “in the Spirit” to discern the Spirit. Though some might complain that such a posture is helplessly subjective, that's just the way it is: Scripture demands that we be filled with/walk in the Spirit for all matters—and that includes discerning the Spirit's guidance. Additionally, several criteria (put in the form of a question) help us to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit: (1) Is such guidance in accordance with the Word of God? (2) Does such direction exalt Jesus Christ? (3) Does such guidance result in sanctification and engagement in good works? (4) Is such guidance directed at engaging others with the gospel? (5) Does the church confirm this direction of the Spirit?

Being “in the Spirit” and using these criteria appropriately will enable us to discern the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Accordingly, we pray “*Veni, Creator Spiritus*” (attributed to Gregory the Great, 590–604):

Creator-Spirit, all-Divine
Come, visit every soul of Thine,

And fill with Thy celestial flame
The hearts which Thou Thyself didst frame.

O gift of God, Thine is the sweet
Consoling name of Paraclete—
And spring of life and fire and love
And unction flowing from above.

The mystic sevenfold gifts are Thine,
Finger of God's right hand divine;
The Father's promise sent to teach
The tongue a rich and heavenly speech.

Kindle with fire brought above
Each sense, and fill our hearts with love;
And grant our flesh, so weak and frail,
The strength of Thine which cannot fail.

Drive far away our deadly foe.
And grant us Thy true peace to know;
So we, led by Thy guidance still,
May safely pass through every ill.

To us, through Thee, the grace be shown
To know the Father and the Son;
And Spirit of Them both, may we
Forever rest our faith in Thee.

To Sire and Son be praises meet,

And to the Holy Paraclete;
And may Christ send us from above
That Holy Spirit's gift of love.

¹ For help in this area, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011); abridged as *For the Love of God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015). See also Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Andreas Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

² Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, 28.

³ Tetrapolitan Confession (1530), chap. 5. <http://apostles-creed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/tetrapolatan-strasbourg-swabian-confession.pdf>.