

**The Faith We Confess:**  
*A Series of Sermons on the Core Doctrines of the Christian Faith*  
**The Holy Spirit: “The Lord and Giver of All Life”**

The Holy Spirit scares the heck out of most Presbyterians.

Most of us, except for some feminists and inclusive language fanatics in the church, are ok with God the Father. We can make sense of him. The Father is a concrete image that is imbedded in our minds. Jesus talks a lot about praying to his Father in heaven. We can wrap our minds around Father because it is so human and parental in its imagery.

We understand Jesus; not fully, of course, but Jesus does come to us in human flesh. He is a person whom we humans could see, touch and be with, during his life on earth. Because of this he is even more concrete and tangible than the Father. That’s why the Bible says that “We do not have a high priest (meaning Jesus) who is unable to sympathize with us, but rather we have one who has tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.” In Jesus Christ God becomes one of us! God knows what it is like to suffer, to hurt, and to struggle, because God experienced all of that in the coming of his Son.

But the Holy Spirit? He is altogether different. We cannot quite wrap our minds around the Holy Spirit. He is not so tangible. We cannot see the Holy Spirit in the same way that we can see, or could see, Jesus Christ. He is not as easy to understand as the Father. That’s why the Bible gropes for language to describe the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is described in our text from Genesis 1:2 as one who “hovers” or “broods” over the waters. This is something that a bird does. A bird hovers over the skies.

The gospels tell us that when Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit (at the beginning of his public ministry) that the Spirit descended upon him “like a dove.” (Matt. 3:16)

Another prevalent image that the Bible employs to describe what the Holy Spirit is like is that of fire.

John the Baptist, in his ministry of preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world, told his hearers that he could only baptize with water, but Jesus would baptize with them “the Holy Spirit and fire.” After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, while the disciples were all huddled together in the upper room, the book of Acts tell us that when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples it seemed to them to be “tongues of fire.” (Acts 2:3)

The most evocative and prevalent image in all the Bible for the Holy Spirit is “wind.” In fact, that is what both the Hebrew word in the OT for Spirit (*ruach*) and the Greek work for Spirit in the NT (*pneuma*) means! It means “wind” or “breath.” This image is evocative because we cannot see the wind. The wind is invisible. We know it’s there, we can feel it, but we cannot see

it. So it is quite appropriate that the Holy Spirit is named the Holy Spirit because we cannot see or touch Him.

The problem that we Presbyterians have is that we pride ourselves on loving God with our minds (sometimes arrogantly) and because of that the Holy Spirit can scare us. The Spirit is mysterious and evocative. He is not someone who can always be figured out; the Spirit “blows where He wills,” as our scripture from the gospel of John tells us. For a people who claim to love God with their minds this can be problematic because we cannot figure out the Holy Spirit in the same way we can figure out a mathematical equation.

The other thing that scares us about the Holy Spirit is the fact that He cannot be tamed. The Holy Spirit is the One in the Bible who is responsible for ecstatic spiritual experiences such as “prophesying” and “speaking in tongues.” You know, all of that stuff that Pentecostals do. People who are “Spirit-led” are often the ones who are most open to the possibility that God is still in the miracles business and there is nothing tame about miracles because they defy the laws of nature.

The Holy Spirit is also the one who sometimes calls us to stop dead in our tracks and change directions. The problem that we Presbyterians have is that we like to do things decently and in order and by committee, so sometimes the Holy Spirit is too “wild” and “unorderly” for our tastes.

That’s why when the preacher starts talking about the Holy Spirit some Presbyterians get a little antsy. The Holy who? That stuff is for Pentecostals, not Presbyterians! Consequently, some of us know little about the Holy Spirit, who he is and what he does in the world and in our lives.

So today we are going to talk about the Holy Spirit and his ministry. The creed brings us to this subject by saying, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.”

The title of the sermon is called, *The Holy Spirit: “The Lord and Giver of all Life.”* You might think of today’s message as “The Holy Spirit 101.” We will be talking about the basics of who the Holy Spirit is and what He does.

### **The Holy Spirit is God.**

First, who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God.

The Holy Spirit is not an “it.” Sometimes Christians wrongly refer to the Holy Spirit as in “it.” God is not an “it.” The Holy Spirit has personhood.

Nor is the Holy Spirit a force. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is spoken of in this kind of way. Though it is true that the Holy Spirit empowers us for the Christian life, he is not some impersonal magnetic force. Again, the Holy Spirit has personhood.

No, the Holy Spirit is God and God has personhood. That's why it is appropriate to speak of the person of the Holy Spirit. When we say that (the person of the Holy Spirit) we do not mean that the Holy Spirit is human. We call the Holy Spirit a person so that we can reflect, as best as we can, in our limited human language, the fact that He is a personal entity, an eternal living being, with personality, and personal characteristics and traits.

This sermon is not the one where I will go more in depth on the doctrine of the Trinity; that one will come in a few more weeks, but it needs to be said here that the Holy Spirit is God, along with God the Father, and God the Son. All three are in essence one God, yet they are each distinct and different from one another, though not divided. In other words, The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father, the Holy Spirit is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit.

It also needs to be said that all three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, have always lived and existed, and always will live and exist, from throughout all eternity, because all three of them are eternally the one Triune God. In other words, it is wrong to think of God as existing as Father before the time of Jesus, and then to think of God as existing as the Son during the time of Jesus, and now to think of God as being the Holy Spirit after the time of Jesus. This is wrong. All three persons of the Trinity have uniquely lived and existed from throughout all eternity as the one Triune God.

Now how do we know that we understand the Bible rightly when we speak of the Holy Spirit as being God? The chief way, but not the only way, that we know we are right in addressing the Holy Spirit as God, is because the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the creator and giver of all life, along with the Father and the Son. Only God can create and since the Bible attributes creation to the work of the Holy Spirit, it is right to refer to the Holy Spirit as God. This leads me to my second point about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Creator and Giver of all life.

### **The Holy Spirit is the Giver of All Physical Life**

First the Holy Spirit is the giver of all physical life. In our text from Genesis 1 it tells us that before the creation of the world, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, was hovering over the primordial earth and waters. Before creation there was utter chaos and emptiness then out of nothing the Spirit of God created and brought about light, land, and life to the earth.

In Genesis 2 the Bible tells us about the unique creation of Adam and Eve and in that story the Bible teaches us that God "breathed into man the breath of life" and man became "a living being."

Remember, the word in the OT for the Spirit is “ruach,” which means “breath,” and here the Bible tells us that God’s Spirit breathed into man the breath of life. This is a clear picture of the Holy Spirit giving life to man. Only God can create and give life.

This ought to have profound effects on our understanding of the meaning and value of all human life. I talked about this more extensively in one of my first sermons in this series, “God the Father Almighty: Maker of All Things,” but it needs to be reiterated again. All human life is created by God and only God has the right to end human life. All life is sacred and this should influence the Christian in his valuing human life, from the womb of the mother to the last breath of old age.

Our problem today is that our culture has become so secular that it sees self-fulfillment, comfort, convenience, and the pursuit of pleasure and happiness as the ultimate goal in life; therefore when “life gets in the way” it can be terminated in the name of one’s inherent right to seek self-fulfillment and happiness. Much of the moral justification for abortion, euthanasia, and physician assisted suicide is rooted in this very anti-Biblical idea.

We don’t have the right to end our own lives or anyone else’s life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable and most helpless, the unborn and the aged, in the name of convenience, furthering one’s aims for self-fulfillment and happiness, and the avoiding of suffering in one’s life. This is wrong. The Holy Spirit is the creator of life and when we do this we are destroy the very creation of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Holy Spirit is the Giver of All Spiritual Life**

Not only is the Holy Spirit the creator of all physical life, but His is also the giver of all spiritual life. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we cannot have life with God and know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Bible says that no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. (I Cor. 12:3)

The Bible teaches us that though our hearts beat and blood runs through our veins, we are dead spiritually speaking. The apostle Paul put it strong in his letter to the Ephesians when he said that we are “dead in our transgressions and sins.” (Eph. 2:1) Dead means dead and dead people can’t raise themselves to life.

In our text from John Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be “born again” in order to know God and enter into his kingdom.

Just as it is impossible for a baby to conceive himself so too is it impossible for us to conceive ourselves spiritually speaking. We cannot create our own life and relationship with God. We are spiritually dead. We must be “born again” and Jesus tells Nicodemus that if that is going to happen then it must be a miracle the Holy Spirit must do in our lives. “The Spirit must give birth to the spirit.” (v.6)

This makes our salvation in Jesus Christ a total act of God's grace. God the Holy Spirit must quicken our dead hearts to faith in Christ and unites us to Jesus through a living and saving relationship with him. We cannot self-concoct the faith. If you have faith in Jesus Christ today, if you have embraced his work on the cross, it is because you have been "born of the Spirit." (v.8)

But not only is the Holy Spirit responsible for our conversion to faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit is also the One who enables us to live new lives for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit wants to do a work of renewal and restoration in our lives. He is the One who goes about the business of crucifying the old sinful man that once so dominated us apart from Christ and rebirthing in us into the "new man," "the new creation," who begins to live a life to the glory of God and in accordance to the will of Christ.

The Bible teaches us that when we come to faith in Jesus the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us.

Jesus talked about this a lot in the gospel of John when he talked about the Counselor who would come to live inside of us after his crucifixion. Our bodies, our minds, and spirits become the dwelling place for the Spirit of God to live and that is how and why the fruit of the Holy Spirit begins to produce a good crop of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control" in our lives.

## **Conclusion**

In short, it is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to conform our lives into the image of Jesus Christ. If this truth delights you then it is a sign that you have been filled with the Holy Spirit. All Christians have the Holy Spirit. But If this truth means nothing to you, if the thought of "dying to sin" and being "conformed into the image of Christ" has no bearing upon your spirit, then it might be a sign that you do not know Jesus. Anyone who knows Christ will want to be like Christ, no matter how far he's got to go, or how hard that might be.

Our responsibility as Christians is to not "quench the Spirit" in our lives.

The Holy Spirit wants to give us life but the Spirit will withdraw himself if we are desirous of rebelling against his work in our hearts. That's why in several places the Bible speaks of the Spirit being quenched or withdrawn in the lives of those who are resistant to the Spirit's work of sanctification and change in their lives.

How we open ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit, (though not always easy) is not that complex. We avail ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit through prayer, the reading of scripture, and corporate worship with God's people in the church. We do it also through sincere, genuine, Spirit-led efforts to resist temptation and obey the commands of God in our lives. Though this does not save us, it certainly does not absolve us from "fighting the good fight" against the works of the flesh. It is through these simple means that God the Holy Spirit does his work of transformation in our lives.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.