SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: MAN, CHRIST, AND HOLY SPIRIT
Week Eleven: The Holy Spirit, Part 2

Introduction and Review

This is the final session in a study of the doctrines of humanity, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Last week, we surveyed what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit. As with the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is developed progressively throughout the canon of Scripture; what is expressed in shadow form in the Old Testament is made clear in the New Testament. This week, we will look at how the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been debated throughout church history and summarize a healthy, biblical understanding of the Spirit and his work.

What Has the Church Said?

There have been numerous debates about the Holy Spirit during the history of the church. Some of them are matters of orthodoxy versus heresy, while others surround matters more related to the work of the Spirit. In the last century, the Holy Spirit has been the subject of considerable controversy among Christians across the theological spectrum.

The Patristic Era (100–600)

In the early church, the primary debate was over the deity of the Holy Spirit and his place within the Trinity. While the early Christians were convinced the Spirit is in some sense divine, there were some who argued that the Spirit was simply a personification of God’s spiritual power and others who argued that the Spirit was a person, but was subordinate to the Father and the Son. The Spirit was in many ways “put on the back-burner” for a couple of centuries while debates focused more on the person of Christ.

Two key thinkers helped the church to understand that the Spirit is fully divine and is one of the persons within the triune Godhead. Basil of Caesarea was one of the famous Cappadocian Fathers who defended the doctrine of the Trinity during the latter half of the fourth century. In his book On the Holy Spirit, Basil argued for the full divinity of the Spirit and his spiritual equality with the Father and Son. He claimed that the Bible, the best of the Christian tradition, and even the church’s liturgy all pointed to the Spirit’s deity. Basil’s views were codified in the Nicene Creed, which was adopted in its final form at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

A generation later, Augustine of Hippo wrote an important treatise titled On The Trinity wherein he made the same arguments. But Augustine also argued that the Holy Spirit is as much the Spirit of Christ in particular as he is the Spirit of God in general. Augustine claimed the Spirit “proceeded” from the Father and the Son, an idea that Latin-speaking Catholics incorporated into the Nicene Creed by adding the “filioque clause” at the Council of Toledo in 589. The debate over the double procession of the Spirit played a key role in the Great Schism that divided Christendom into Catholic and Orthodox camps in 1054.

There was also an early debate over the work of the Holy Spirit. By the second century, most Christians had come to believe that the spiritual gifts of prophesies and tongues had ended with...
the deaths of the apostles or shortly thereafter. But during the 170s, a movement called Montanism emerged and began arguing for the continuation of prophecy and speaking in tongues. Montanists never became part of the mainstream church because of their views of spiritual gifts and their legalistic tendencies; they died out in the fifth century.

**The Medieval Era (ca. 600–1500)**

There were relatively few debates about the Holy Spirit during the middle ages. There continued to be some Montanist-like sects that argued for prophecy and tongues, especially around the close of the first millennium. These groups believed that the miraculous gifts were signs that Christ would return in 1000 AD. These groups were never in the majority.

The major development related to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had to do with the Spirit’s relationship to the church’s tradition. In the second half of the Medieval period, Catholics became convinced that the Spirit inspired unwritten tradition in the same way he inspired the Holy Scriptures, resulting in a “dual authority” view of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Dissenters such as John Wycliffe and John Huss appreciated the importance of church tradition and saw it as a secondary authority worth respecting, but they argued that supreme authority rested in the Scriptures and not tradition. The reformers picked up this argument in the sixteenth century in their critiques of Catholicism.

**The Reformation Era (ca. 1500–1650)**

All the reformers agreed that the Spirit had uniquely inspired Scripture and that tradition was a secondary authority at best (the Anabaptists completely rejected tradition). The Reformed churches made a very important contribution to the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and Scripture by arguing that the Word and Spirit work in tandem to bring about God’s purposes. Because the Spirit inspired the written Word, it makes sense that he would help Christians interpret the Word, apply the Word to the hearts of those who read the Bible, and work through the proclamation of the Word to effectually call the elect to saving faith.

Some Reformation era groups embraced prophesy and tongues, particularly some Anabaptists and radical English sects. The Socinians were an Arian-like movement that began in Poland and denied the Trinity, including the deity of the Holy Spirit. Many English Quakers rejected structured worship and preaching, relying on the Holy Spirit to come upon them and lead them in their worship gatherings. Most Quakers also believed that the baptism of the Spirit meant physical baptism was unnecessary.

**The Modern Era (ca. 1650–present)**

There have been a number of important debates about the Holy Spirit during the past four hundred years. During the First Great Awakening in the mid-1700s, John Wesley argued that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a separate event from regeneration. He entertained the idea that Christians could receive this second baptism and be totally free from willful sin, a view he called “Christian perfection.” Wesley gradually backed away from this view when several of the allegedly sinless Christians he knew committed scandalous sins and needed church discipline.
During the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s, Charles Finney re-popularized Wesley’s earlier view, calling it “entire sanctification.” Several other mostly Arminian evangelists and teachers embraced entire sanctification, giving rise to the Holiness movement within Wesleyan circles. Similar to Wesley, the Holiness movement argued for a second baptism of the Spirit that freed Christians from deliberate sin. Hannah Whitall Smith’s *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* is probably the most popular book arguing for a Holiness view of the Spirit’s work.

In the late 1800s, some non-Wesleyan evangelicals countered the Holiness movement with what was called Keswick theology. Keswick is a city in England that hosted the conference where this doctrine was first developed. According to Keswick theology, there are multiple fillings of the Holy Spirit that come and go over time. These fillings empower Christians for evangelism and other ministry and help believers experience victory over particular sins (but not sinless perfection). Largely due to the influence of D.L. Moody, Keswick views became popular among revivalistic and Dispensationalist evangelicals and fundamentalists. R.A. Torrey’s *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* is probably the most popular book arguing for the Keswick view.

As early as the 1820s, some British evangelicals revived prophecy and speaking in tongues. Following the ideas of Jonathan Edwards (who did not practice these gifts), they argued that the recovery of these gifts would lead to the evangelization of the world and the Second Coming. Miraculous gifts never caught on in England, but in America a miraculous gifts movement took off in the early twentieth century. The movement began with Holiness Christians who argued that speaking in tongues was a sign one had received the second baptism and sinless perfection. In 1901 and (more famously) 1906, outbursts of speaking in tongues made national news.

The Asuza Street Revival of 1906 is often considered the birth of the Pentecostal movement. Within a decade, most Pentecostals had rejected sinless perfection, arguing instead that tongues were a sign that the last days had begun, the whole world would soon be evangelized, and then the church could be raptured. As a general rule, Pentecostals formed new denominations, argued that the second baptism was always accompanied by tongues and should be sought by all Christians, and leaned heavily Arminian in their view of salvation. The Church of God, Assembly of God, and Church of God of Prophecy are all Pentecostal denominations. Most prosperity gospel preachers are Pentecostals.

In the late 1950s, a second phase of the miraculous gifts movement began when Christians in mainstream denominations began practicing Pentecostal-like gifts. These “Charismatics” tended to form renewal movements within existing denominations rather than forming new denominations. They also disagreed as to whether or not every Christian should speak in tongues or whether it was like other spiritual gifts—some believers have it, while others do not. The most influential legacy of the Charismatic movement is Contemporary Christian Music; almost all of the earliest CCM artists were Charismatics, many of them part of the Charismatic-influenced Jesus People movement.

In the early 1980s, the “Third Wave” of the miraculous gifts movement began at Fuller Theological Seminary. Third Wave Christians mostly rejected a second baptism in favor of multiple fillings of the Spirit. They also argued that speaking in tongues and prophecy were not intended to be practiced by all Christians. Third Wavers formed interdenominational networks
and were more open to Calvinism. The most influential legacy of the Third Wave Movement is praise and worship music; Vineyard, Maranatha, and Sovereign Grace are all Third Wave.

Despite the popularity of the miraculous gifts movement, especially in the Majority World, many Christians continued to believe that prophecy and tongues ceased around the end of the apostolic era. Most Catholics and many evangelicals remain “cessassionists,” especially those of Reformed or dispensational convictions. A growing number of evangelicals are unconvincing the miraculous gifts have ceased, yet they do not practice the gifts or seek to do so. These “soft continualists” often argue that they are open, but cautious about prophecy and tongues.

What Should We Believe?

We should continue to affirm the historic Christian affirmation of the deity of the Holy Spirit and his place as the third member of the Trinity. The Spirit is God—he is worthy of our worship and the one who enables our worship. The doctrine of the Spirit is developed over the biblical canon, moving from shadow in the Old Testament to clarity in the New Testament. Prior to Pentecost, the Spirit regenerated the elect (“circumcision of the heart,” Deut. 30:6) and temporarily empowered individuals for particular vocations and tasks. The Spirit’s ministry becomes much more pronounced and permanent among new covenant believers. He regenerates the elect, permanently indwells us as he uses our bodies as his temple, seals us as God’s adopted children, empowers us with spiritual gifts, and preserves us in our faith until the end of our lives.

It becomes more complicated with the question of miraculous gifts, even among Southern Baptists. A few Southern Baptists are Charismatics, while a much larger number affirm (or at least lean) cessassionist. Many Southern Baptists are soft continualists. Even among those who affirm the continuation of the miraculous gifts, there is debate about which alleged experiences are biblical and which are more questionable. Many soft continualists believe the miraculous gifts are still practiced from time to time, but most often in contexts where the gospel is first taking hold. To say it another way, miraculous gifts are practiced more prevalently in those contexts that most resemble the context of the Book of Acts.


The Baptist Faith and Message (2000)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.¹
Confessional Statement of The Gospel Coalition

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.\(^2\)

How Should We Then Live?

**Exercising Spiritual Gifts:** Every Christian is granted one or more spiritual gifts that are for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. These gifts are normally discerned through a combination of three things: desire, involvement, and community affirmation. We should always be asking ourselves the best way to identify and use our spiritual gifts (and sanctified natural talents!) to pursue the lost, build up the saved, care for the needy, and serve the body.

**Spirit-led Bible Study and Teaching:** The same Spirit who inspired the Bible also illuminates our understanding of the Bible and shows us how to apply the Word to our lives, families, and churches. When studying the Bible, ask the Spirit to lead you to biblical truth and teach you how to apply biblical truth. When teaching the Bible to others or proclaiming the Scriptures to unbelievers, pray the Spirit would open ears and soften hearts so that each person receives what they need from the ministry of the Word.

**Recommended Reading**


Notes:
