

## CHAPTER 6.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS PERSON AND WORK

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Do Reformed churches emphasize the Holy Spirit enough? That is a valid question. Some people think that the answer is no. They would say, “If you want to find people who really emphasize the working of the Holy Spirit, then you have to go to a Pentecostal or charismatic church. After all, it’s the charismatics who are always talking about, and experiencing, the gifts of the Spirit.”

In addition, someone who is familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism might point out that only one Lord’s Day deals specifically with the person and work of the Holy Spirit: Lord’s Day 20. It is even a small Lord’s Day with just two, rather short, sentences. By comparison, the Catechism’s treatment of the person and work of Jesus Christ runs from Lord’s Day 11 through Lord’s Day 19, for a total of nine Lord’s Days. So, at first glance it might seem that the Catechism is giving far less attention to the Holy Spirit. That might lead someone to think that Reformed churches have taken their cue from the Catechism and given only a minor role to the Holy Spirit.

However, a closer look reveals that this is not true. In fact, the Holy Spirit is mentioned some forty times in the Catechism, beginning already in very first Lord’s Day (“Therefore, by his Holy Spirit” Q&A 1) and running right through to the last one (“by the power of your Holy Spirit” Q&A 127). So, the Catechism does give extensive treatment to the work of the Holy Spirit, only it does so in an integrated fashion. That is to

say, the Holy Spirit runs back and forth like a golden thread, woven through the entire tapestry of Reformed doctrine. In the sixteenth century, this same integrated approach was used by John Calvin, the man to whom many Reformed churches still look for guidance today. Indeed, he emphasized the Holy Spirit to such an extent that he has even been called “The Theologian of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Evidently, Reformed theology and Reformed churches have more to say about the Holy Spirit than some people might initially think.

We have purposefully saved the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for this particular place in this volume. The last chapter was about the atoning work of Christ. Soon, in chapters eight through twelve, we will cover different aspects of the doctrine of salvation, or soteriology. So, on one side, there is the work of Christ *for us*; on the other side, we speak of the work of Christ *in us*. The one who unites us to Christ and makes us share in all his benefits is the Holy Spirit. It is by his presence and power that our salvation is carried forward from *for us* to *in us*. Thus, this is an ideal place to consider the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which is also called pneumatology.

Before going any further, though, we need to realize that studying the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is an unavoidably personal endeavour. That does not mean it is individualistic, but it does mean it cannot be abstract. The Spirit of God lives, literally, right within those who belong to Christ (Rom 8:6). In fact, our very bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit in which he dwells (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Thus, as we study the Holy Spirit we are learning about something that is very close to home. It is not without reason that the Catechism, in Lord’s Day 20 about the Holy Spirit, uses the word *me* no less than four times in a single sentence. Surely, that little statistic should prompt us, in a big way, to study the Third Person of our Triune God in a thoroughly personal way. Let us begin by paying attention to who the Spirit is, and then turn to what he does with us and in us.

1. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 5:21.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT: TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

At the end of 2 Corinthians 3, as the apostle Paul is providing a glimpse at our future glory, he makes a rather remarkable statement, even repeating it twice. The verses are as follows:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17–18).

Clearly, in this passage “the Lord” refers to God for it is the glory of God (2 Cor 3:18) that we reflect in an ever-increasing fashion. In light of this, it is significant that the apostle says, “The Lord is *the* Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17). The original language of the verse makes it clear that the apostle is not saying, at this point, that God is a spiritual being in contrast to human beings who have physical bodies. That is, of course, true. Jesus indicated this to the woman at the well of Sychar, when he said, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). However, in 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul is making a different point. He is saying, “God is the Spirit,” which also means that the Holy Spirit is God.

This truth is also revealed in other passages. In Matthew 28:19, the Lord instructs his apostles to go and baptize those who repent in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is placed on the same divine level as the Father and the Son. Significantly, all three persons are joined together under one “name” (a singular noun), rather than being identified by three separate names (a plural noun). In addition, in Acts 5:3 the apostle Peter asks Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?” Then, a few sentences later, while still speaking to the same man, the apostle underlines his point by saying, “You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). The only reasonable way to understand these passages is to conclude that the Holy Spirit is God. More examples could be given, but the truth remains unaltered: the Holy Spirit is God.

Already in the early church, this truth was officially affirmed, especially in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. To begin with, the Nicene Creed states, “we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life.” Here the Holy Spirit is identified first as “the Lord,” and then immediately thereafter as the “Giver of life,” which is, to be sure, a divine prerogative (Neh 9:6; Isa 42:5). Thus, the Nicene Creed leaves no doubt: the Holy Spirit is God. Next, the Athanasian Creed expresses this truth in even more explicit terms when it asserts:

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord (15–18).

The Reformed Confessions concur. The Belgic Confession openly acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is “of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us” (Art. 11). Likewise, the Catechism affirms that the Spirit is “together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God.”

Why do the creeds and confessions emphasize the divinity of the Holy Spirit so strongly? There are two basic reasons. In the first place, as we already saw in 2 Corinthians 3, this is how the Word of God speaks about the Holy Spirit, and true faith accepts all that God has revealed in his Word (LD 7, Q&A 21), including the truth that the Spirit is God. Secondly, among other things, the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in both our regeneration (i.e., being born again), and our sanctification (i.e., being renewed after the likeness of Christ). Neither of these two miracles can be accomplished by the power of a creature, no matter how powerful that creature may be (John 3:6; Rom 8:5–8, esp. v. 7). To put it plainly, if the Spirit is not true God, then no one is truly regenerated or sanctified either. We need one who is God to sanctify us, just as much as we needed one who is God to have been sacrificed for us.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS NAMES

The names given to the Spirit of God also reveal something about who he is. The most well recognized one, used almost one hundred times in Scripture, is “the Holy Spirit.” Since he is holy, the Spirit is set apart in a unique class. Of course, to be divine is to be different than creatures. Yet, to be more specific, the Holy Spirit is certainly not a human spirit, for at times he even wrestles against the stubborn spirits of sinfully corrupt people (Gen 6:3). He is also the polar opposite of the evil spirits, the fallen angels. In fact, Holy Spirit drives out the evil spirits, sending them away even against their will (Matt 12:28).

Another frequently used name for the Holy Spirit is “Spirit of the LORD,” including alternate forms such as “the Spirit of God,” “my Spirit,” and “the Spirit of Christ.” This name cluster occurs some seventy times in Scripture, and it emphasizes the close connection between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They truly belong to each other in a most exalted and eternal sense. It is important to note that, even by just looking at his names, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is not a divine lone ranger. He exists, eternally and intimately, together with the Father and the Son.

Another name that gives us insight into the person of the Spirit is the “Counselor.” Just as God the Son is the “Wonderful Counselor” (Isa 9:6), so the Holy Spirit is certainly a no less Wonderful Counselor. Indeed, he is the counterpart Helper, or Counselor, whom the Christ promised to send down to his people after his death, resurrection, and ascension (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In Scripture, a counselor is someone who is called to be at your side, to help you out. For example, a lawyer is a counselor who is called in to help you through the finer details of some legal matter, and if necessary to speak on your behalf. According to Christ’s explanation at the Last Supper, as Counselor the Holy Spirit will be near us, teach us, testify to us about Christ, and convict the world of sin. In other words, the Spirit is busy communicating with us and convincing us of all the truth revealed to us by the Son of God.

However, is this Counselor a divine person or a divine power? To be sure, this is a critical issue. In the early church a group called the Dynamic Monarchianists taught that the Spirit was merely a power that emanated from God. Their name may be quite a mouthful, but their teaching is similar to the Jehovah's Witnesses today who speak of the Holy Spirit as an "it," not a "he." To be precise, they teach that the Holy Spirit is *not* a person but a powerful force that God sends out from himself to accomplish his will. It is conceivable that someone might turn to the words of Jesus, shortly before his ascension, looking for support for this idea. On that occasion, Jesus said, "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city [of Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). However, the golden rule for understanding God's Word is always to interpret Scripture with Scripture. Later on, in Acts 1:8 the same inspired writer gives us more details of what Jesus actually said. Part of his message was the following: "But you [disciples] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." So, the Holy Spirit is not himself the power, but he is the source of that power.

Also, let us bear in mind that all of this is not simply theological trivia. On the contrary, it has a profound impact on how we think about the Holy Spirit and how we live in relation to him. The Holy Spirit is a divine person whom we can rebel against (Ps 106:33), grieve (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30), and insult (Heb 10:29). If the Holy Spirit were nothing more than a force, we would not be too concerned about such sins. After all, who feels guilty about insulting a force like electricity? However, precisely because the Holy Spirit is a divine person who grieves and even groans (Rom 8:26), we, who are temples of the Holy Spirit, must aim to conduct ourselves in a conscientiously pious manner. If we do not like insulting other people, then why would we do it to the Holy Spirit? Added to that, the Holy Spirit is someone who desires what is upright (Rom 8:5), testifies about our adoption as God's children (Rom 8:16), and intercedes for us during our prayers (Rom 8:26). No mere power desires or testifies—let alone intercedes! Those are all actions of him who is a Person.

Finally, the Holy Spirit, who is now our other Counselor, was clearly poured out after the departure of our first Counselor, who is Christ. Still, no one should think that we have not been downgraded from a counselor who is a Person to one that is only a power. Far from it! Our beloved Saviour himself assures us that we are better, not worse, off, having now received the other Counselor, who is the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT: TOGETHER WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON

Lord's Day 20 begins in an interesting way. It says, "First, [the Holy Spirit] is, together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God." Why does the Catechism add that phrase, "together with the Father and the Son"? From what we discovered above, it is definitely in line with the names of the Spirit that we find in Scripture. He is frequently called "the Spirit of the LORD," emphasizing his connection to the Father, and "the Spirit of Christ," highlighting his connection to the Son. At the same time, we should remember that just as the three *exist* together as the one, true, and eternal God, so they also *work* together as the one, true, and eternal God—in inexpressibly seamless harmony.

God's first act of creation is an excellent example of Trinitarian co-operation. God the Father is the one who created all things (Gen 1:1; Eccl 11:5; Isa 44:24). At the same time, there was not one thing made which was not made through the Son (John 1:3). Indeed, "by him all things were created" (Col 1:16). The Spirit of God was also right there, hovering over the waters from the very beginning (Gen 1:2). Even though the work of creation is distinctly and correctly attributed to God the Father, the Holy Spirit was closely involved—never at cross-purposes, always in perfect co-operation. In fact, the Holy Spirit is still very closely involved with the renewal of the earth every springtime again (Ps 104:30). In other words, the Trinitarian co-operation demonstrated at creation continues in providence (Col 1:17; Job 33:4).

Yet how do we properly distinguish between the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? The roles of the Father and the Son are more precisely defined by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6. There he writes, "Yet

for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” The Father is the one from whom all things originate. He is the source, and his work is characterized by the Greek preposition *ek*, that is, *from* or *out of*. The Son is the one through whom all things came into being. He is the Craftsman at his Father’s side (Prov 8:30). His work is characterized by the Greek preposition *dia*, which means *through*. Finally, numerous passages speak of the Father or the Son accomplishing something “by the Spirit” (Matt 12:28; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18). The Spirit is the Almighty Agent by whom a divine plan becomes a *fait accompli*. His work is best described using the Greek preposition *en*, which means *by*. So, generally speaking, this is how our Triune God works together, in both creation and salvation: from (*ek*) the Father, through (*dia*) the Son, by (*en*) the Holy Spirit.

As we might expect, this holy synchronization between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also became apparent on Pentecost Day. On the one hand, it is scripturally correct to say that the Father sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Yet, on the other hand, it is also correct to say that Christ the Son poured out the Spirit (John 15:26; Acts 2:33). When we confess the truth of the Trinity, there is no need to fear some kind of contradiction here. Rather, this close co-operation between all three persons is typical of all their plans and actions. Thus, the Nicene Creed rightly confesses that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father *and the Son*,” which is otherwise known as the *filioque* clause. *Filioque* is simply the Latin word for the English phrase “and the Son.”

Yet, since the three divine persons work together so seamlessly, they should also be worshipped together equally. The church has always acknowledged this, as the Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit “who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.” However, the church has not always been so successful in accomplishing in her liturgy what she acknowledges in her creed. Although it is true that the Holy Spirit does not seek glory for himself, but rather promotes the glory of the Son (John 16:14), this does not detract from the fact that in sermon,



supplication, and song, the Holy Spirit should not be forgotten, but rather “worshipped and glorified.”

## THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS WORKS IN OUR LIVES

The title of this section intentionally speaks of the Holy Spirit’s works (plural) in our lives. To be sure, it would have been possible to speak of the work (singular) of the Holy Spirit in our lives. After all, we often do the same for the Son, speaking of his redemptive or atoning work, even though we realize that there are many different aspects to that work. However, this same kind of realization appears to be lacking concerning the Holy Spirit. When asked, “What does the Holy Spirit do for you?” many of us would simply respond, “He sanctifies me.” Correct, but decidedly incomplete!

In the first place, as briefly mentioned above, the Holy Spirit is still as active as he was on the first day, hovering over creation, as it were, and renewing the face of the earth (Ps 104:30). Every time you see the crocuses flowering in the springtime you are witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as the providence of the Father. Moreover, the Old Testament Feast of Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks, coincided with the wheat harvest (Exod 34:22). The wheat that was harvested could only be gathered in due to the earlier, earth-renewing work of the Holy Spirit. How appropriate, then, that the Holy Spirit himself was poured out on a harvest feast called Pentecost.

Also, there is the Spirit’s invaluable work of inspiring the Holy Scriptures. According to the apostle Paul all Scripture is God-breathed, or inspired (2 Tim 3:16). The original word for “breath” is related to the word for Spirit. Clearly, the Spirit of God is responsible for the Word of God. This is confirmed by the apostle Peter when he writes, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The inspired Word of God is the foundation upon which the entire, multi-national household of God is built (Eph 2:22). So, every time you open your Bible, do not forget that you have the incomparable workmanship of the Holy Spirit in your very own hands.

Next, the Spirit's work of equipping and sustaining the Christ must be mentioned. The Spirit came upon him after his baptism (Matt 3:16), thereby anointing him as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Immediately thereafter the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tested through temptation (Matt 4:1), but Christ also endured the temptations of the devil since he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). Similarly, in the atoning sacrifice offered by Christ the Holy Spirit was also involved. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14). In short, if the Spirit had not anointed and equipped the Christ, there would be no Messiah for us to speak of, let alone one to save us.

Yet how will the work of Christ, done for us, be applied to us? Once again, the work of the Holy Spirit is central. He is the one who unites us to Christ. Christ's Spirit dwells in us (Rom 8:9; 1 John 3:24), and therefore even though Christ is in heaven and we here on earth, the Spirit more than bridges this geographical separation. By the Spirit Christ and his church are profoundly one (Eph 5:32). Or, as the Catechism phrases it, "although Christ is in heaven and we are on earth, yet we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, and we forever live and are governed by one Spirit, as the members of our body are by one soul" (LD 28, Q&A 76). This is the believer's union with Christ. When speaking about this union with Christ, the work of the Spirit must be emphasized, otherwise it may well slide off in the direction of some kind of mystical teaching in which the souls of believers slowly merge with God through prolonged meditation. Scripturally speaking, it is the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit, not the power of extended meditation, which unites us to Christ.

Following this, there are numerous aspects of our full salvation in which the Holy Spirit plays an important, if not central, role. Each of these aspects will be dealt with in detail in following lessons, yet it is helpful to list them here now. In this way the wide extent of the Holy Spirit's work in us is more readily appreciated. No one shall see the kingdom of God, unless he is born again. Jesus made this abundantly clear to Nicodemus (John 3:3). Similarly, no one will be born again, unless he is

born of the Spirit. Jesus made that equally clear (John 3:5–6). Another aspect of salvation, faith, includes sincerely accepting the truth revealed in Scripture. Such acceptance has but one source: the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14; cf. 1 Cor 12:3). Adoption as children of God occurs because of the Father’s grace and for the Son’s sake, but it also becomes reality through the Spirit of adoption, the one through whom we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15).

Furthermore, it is impossible to conceive of any progress in sanctification, any resistance of temptation, any success in the battle against Satan’s wicked schemes, unless we attribute these triumphs to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16). Or, to state the matter more positively, if there is to be any harvest of obedient gratitude, then that fruit must be properly called “the fruit of the Spirit” which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22).

Finally, just as surely as the Holy Spirit is the “guarantee of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14), it is also by relying on his strength and sword, which is the Word of truth, that we are able to stand firmly against the devil’s schemes until the end (Eph 6:10–11, 17–18). In other words, from rebirth to final glory, the Spirit of God is directly involved in every step of salvation. Clearly, the work of the Spirit is anything but a minimum; it is rather a manifold maximum. Lord’s Day 20 sums it up this way: “He is also given to me, to make me by true faith share in Christ and all his benefits.” Admittedly, the matter is stated rather succinctly. However, there is something unmistakably powerful in the combination of the word *all* and *me*. They contain far more than their small size might initially indicate. Since the Spirit takes *all* that Christ has and makes *me* a partaker of it, every child of God has many reasons to praise the Holy Spirit.

#### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OT

Obviously, something significant happened on Pentecost Day. The people of God were filled with the Spirit of God. This had been announced

already by the prophet Joel, but it had not actually been fulfilled until Pentecost Day (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:14–21). Naturally, this raises the question: was the Holy Spirit also active in the lives of Old Testament believers? If so, how? Or is the indwelling of the Spirit a blessing that belongs strictly to the New Testament era?

Once again, the principle of interpreting Scripture with Scripture is crucial here. In Genesis 6:8 we read, “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.” This statement stands in stark contrast to the LORD’S description of the rest of humanity who were “corrupt in God’s sight” and “filled with violence” (Gen 6:11). How do we explain this difference between Noah, who was pleasing in God’s sight, and all the rest, who were corrupt in God’s sight? Before running off to explore various theories, we do well to turn to Romans 8:6–8. There the apostle Paul writes:

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

It is clear that the sinful nature, left to its own resources, is simply not able to please God. This applies not only to a certain group of people in the city of Rome; instead, it applies universally to all people (Rom 3:9–18). Therefore, there is only one way in which Noah could have found favour in the eyes of God and that is through the working of the Holy Spirit. Any other explanation would leave us with a contradiction between the OT and NT, and that is impossible because the Lord does not contradict himself. Thus, even though the name of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Genesis 6:8, by comparing Scripture with Scripture we know that he was most certainly at work in Noah’s heart.

The same applies to Abram. In Genesis 15:6 we are told that “Abram believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Connecting this with Romans 10:17, we realize that faith is based on God’s Word. In Abram’s case this was the LORD’S promise that he would have many descendants (Gen 15:5). Also in the OT, the Word of the LORD came via the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet 1:10–12). Therefore, the most

straightforward conclusion is that Abram believed because the Holy Spirit worked that faith in his heart. In sum, then, the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of God's people in the OT, converting them to trust in God and sanctifying their lives in the midst of a godless and wicked society.

The activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people in the old covenant is confirmed especially in the some of the psalms. The most well known psalm in this regard is Psalm 51. King David became guilty of two terrible sins: adultery and murder. However, being genuinely sorry for these sins, he seeks forgiveness (v. 2). Yet forgiveness as such will not be enough. He also needs to be inwardly renewed so that he can stand firm against future temptations that will undoubtedly come his way. For this reason he prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (v. 10). Immediately thereafter he adds, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11). These two are connected to one another. In order to have a steadfast spirit renewed within him, David needs the Holy Spirit working inside of him, even in the inmost parts of his being (v. 6).

Similarly, in Psalm 143 David asks the Lord for help in doing his will, and he again turns toward the Holy Spirit. "Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (v. 10). This reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper when he said to his disciples that the Spirit of truth would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Evidently, the Holy Spirit guided people in both the OT and the NT. In addition the Holy Spirit fought against tenacious evil forces, both in the OT (Gen 6:3) and in the NT (Eph 6:11, 17). He inspired weak and sinful men in the OT (2 Sam 23:22; 2 Chron 24:20) and the NT (Eph 3:5). In short, careful attention to Scripture indicates that, as a foundational principle, we must speak of a strong continuity between the working of the Holy Spirit in the OT and the NT.

Yet clearly, something special still happened on Pentecost Day. To put it in other terms, there must still be something *new* about the New Testament, also concerning the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there is, and the clue to

pinpointing the difference is found in what the apostle Peter himself proclaimed on Pentecost Day, when he said, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has *poured* out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33; Tit 3:6). In the OT the pouring out of oil upon a person’s head was a symbolic action which indicated that that particular person had been ordained and anointed into some kind of special office, be that a priest (Lev 8:12), or a king (2 Kgs 9:6), or a prophet (1 Kgs 19:16; 1 Chron 16:22). Thus, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon God’s people on Pentecost Day, this did not indicate that the Spirit was just beginning his work in earnest. On the contrary, there is something much more specific in view. By quoting from Joel 2 the apostle Peter explains that on Pentecost Day all of God’s people were anointed as prophets. So instead of probing when the Spirit’s work began, we should be asking who was anointed to which particular office.

Previously, in the Old Testament, the prophetic office had been restricted to a certain, specific group of men such as Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. True, Moses once wished that all of God’s people would be prophets (Num 11:29), but during his lifetime that was never more than a wish. On Pentecost Day, God turned Moses’ wish into reality. In addition, through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, God’s people were also anointed to be priests and kings (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6). Formerly, these offices had been restricted to the families of Aaron and David respectively. Pentecost opens that up to the entire household of God. Also, in the OT it is said that the Spirit of God came upon judges (Judg 3:10; 6:43; 11:29), kings (1 Sam 16:23), priests (2 Chron 24:20), or prophets (Ezek 11:5) to equip them with courage and wisdom to fulfill the duties of their office. In a similar way this happens on Pentecost Day as well (Acts 5:31), only now, in the new age of fullness, the empowering Spirit is poured on all God’s people to equip them for their tasks as prophets, priest, and kings in his service.

In sum, Pentecost Day did not mark the moment when the Holy Spirit started to regenerate or sanctify sinners. On the contrary, he had been doing that kind of salvific work ever since the fall into sin; otherwise,

there would be no OT believers to speak of. Instead, Pentecost was the day on which God graciously lifted limitations and brought in a new fullness. The promises of salvation, once restricted largely to the Jewish people, were now being disseminated to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The spread of the gospel, which used to be hindered by linguistic barriers, was now leaping forward from one ethnic group to the next with astonishing speed (Acts 1:8–11). Also, the privilege and responsibility of being prophets, priest, and kings in God’s nation, once restricted to certain individuals and family lines, was now shared by all God’s people, young and old, male and female alike (Acts 2:17–18). Surely, Pentecost Day was a significant step forward in God’s grand plan of redemption. Bearing in mind the personal aspect of the Spirit’s work, it is fitting to take a moment and meditate on how blessed you are by the Spirit’s work in your life.

*Suggested Readings: Psalm 51:7–12; John 14:15–31*

#### QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Skim through the Heidelberg Catechism and see if you can find at least ten of the forty references to the Holy Spirit in this confession. To which areas of our life before and with the Lord is the Holy Spirit involved? Are there particular areas that caught your attention because you never really considered that aspect of the Spirit’s work before?
2. Here is a quote from a training manual that belongs to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. “It is logical to conclude that the holy spirit is the active force of God. It is not a person but is a powerful force that God causes to emanate from himself to accomplish his holy will” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, p. 381). Evaluate this statement in the light of Scripture.
3. The apostle Paul treats the work of the Holy Spirit at some length in 1 Corinthians 2. Read this chapter. Identify *three* distinct aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Briefly describe why each aspect is crucial for our salvation.
4. While praying in Nehemiah 9, the Levites recall before the Lord

how he had given them “your good Spirit to instruct them” (v. 20) during their years of wandering in the wilderness. However, when we read the account of the exodus in the books of Exodus and Numbers, we do not read very much about the Holy Spirit. How was the Holy Spirit active among God’s people in the wilderness wanderings?

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think many Christians have an easier time speaking about their personal relationship with the Father and the Son as compared to describing their relationship with the Holy Spirit? What can be done to remedy this?
2. The LORD spoke to his people through OT prophets such as Elijah and Isaiah (2 Kgs 17:13). At the same time there was also a school, or company, of prophets (1 Sam 19:18–24; 2 Kgs 2:1–15). Then, in the NT there were prophets such as Agabus (Acts 11:27–28), prophetesses such as Anna (Luke 2:36), and all Christians who are prophets (Acts 2:17–19). Are all these different groups of prophets and prophetesses the same? If not, what is common among them all, and what distinguishes one group from another?
3. Galatians 5:22–23 is one of the more famous passages about the Holy Spirit. Familiarity, though, sometimes causes us to overlook certain things. Why does the apostle Paul speak of the fruit (singular) of the Spirit, rather than the fruits (plural) of the Spirit? If a certain Christian is full of joy but dismal at keeping commitments (i.e., faithfulness), is the fruit of the Spirit still evident in his life? Why does the apostle add, “Against such things there is no law” (v. 23)? Isn’t love, the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, the very fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10)?

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