



Have you ever watched that show on PBS called *Antiques Roadshow*? It's actually very interesting. These antique experts go all over the country and people bring their old stuff and see if it's worth anything. It's amazing what some of that stuff is worth! But every once in awhile someone has something that would be of real worth but it's missing just one thing. Like there was this vase with inlaid stones and it was missing just one stone and the value was cut in half. Sometime what seems like the smallest thing can make the biggest difference.

Today we're continuing our study on the Apostle's Creed. We're more than half way through and basically we've been examining God. We started with God the Father: *I believe in God the Father Almighty...* Then we looked at God the Son: *...and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.* The Creed spent a lot of time on the birth, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus. But if we're going to talk about the triune God there's still one person missing. Finally, after over 80 words devoted to the Father and the Son the Creed comes to God the Holy Spirit. He only gets five words, but He's like that one small stone that makes the biggest difference.

If I were to ask you to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, what would you say? Often people get very mystical and vague when they speak about the Spirit. A. W. Tozer wrote when the average Christian thinks about the Holy Spirit, "He's likely to imagine a nebulous substance like a wisp of invisible smoke which is said to be present in churches and to hover over good people when they die." Often we avoid the subject because the Spirit has been a source of controversy. At times it seems like the Holy Spirit has become the forgotten member of the Trinity. Francis Chan even wrote a book on the Holy Spirit called *The Forgotten God*.

But consider the fact that without the Holy Spirit you might not even be here today. You wouldn't have ever been able to become a follower of Christ. You'd have no assurance God loved you and was at work in your life. You'd have no hope of ever changing or growing. You couldn't open this book and understand it. Your prayer life would stink. Service would be drudgery. Without the Spirit, your life in Christ would be like a long, uphill walk through a barren, dry desert, with no hope of ever reaching a shady brook where you could sit and rest and drink. No love, no joy, no peace.

The Holy Spirit brings life and peace and freedom. There's a very significant verse buried in 2 Corinthians. Paul writes, "**Now the**

Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). We all want freedom. I want to look at several ways the Spirit of God brings freedom into our lives.

The Holy Spirit frees us from spiritual blindness.

The first thing the Spirit does is free us from spiritual blindness. 2 Cor. 4:4 says, "*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel.*" Apart from the Spirit, we're like people walking around in a dark room, feeling for a light switch, yet the only switch is on the outside of the room, and we're locked in. How will we get some light so we can see?

This is where the Spirit begins His work. He turns the light on. He begins by convicting us of sin. Jesus said when the Spirit comes "*he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*" (Jn. 16:8). He exposes need in our life. Prior to this, you were probably quite happy and content. But all of a sudden, you became restless. You began to feel you're missing something, that your life was dirty. You began to see your life in the light of the righteousness of God. You began to sense you weren't right with Him and you needed His forgiveness. That's the Spirit's work.

Then perhaps the Spirit brought someone into your life who shared with the good news about Jesus. All of a sudden, you saw Jesus as you'd never seen Him before. His life became attractive and magnetic. You began to understand the cross was more than just a tragic end to a good man's life, but He died for you. He loved you that much. It was like the scales were falling from your eyes. This is the work of God's Spirit.

Then there came that time you trusted Him. The Bible has an important word for what God does when we trust in Jesus, and the Spirit is right in the middle of it. The word is *regeneration*. That's another word for rebirth. The Bible says when we come to Christ we're "born again" and become a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

How can that be? How can you really start over? In John 3 a religious leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and paid Him a high compliment. He said, "Jesus, it's obvious you've come from God because no one could do the things you do unless God was with him." Nicodemus sounds almost like a Christian to me. But Jesus shoots back at him, "**Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.**" Jesus says being

a religious leader won't get you in. Even believing Jesus was sent from God won't get you in. He says you need a second birthday.

Nicodemus is an old man. He's at that age when he's trying to forget his birthdays! So he says, "How can that be Jesus? It's impossible to go back into your mother's womb and be reborn." Look what Jesus says. "*Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit'*" (John 3:5–8).

It's obvious He's talking about spiritual birth rather than physical birth. But notice this rebirth is a miraculous and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes us a new person. Becoming a Christian is **not** about reforming your life. It's not about changing your morals. It's not about trying to be a better person. It's not learning more about the Bible. All these are good things, but that's not what it means to become a Christian. Becoming a Christian is **not** something **we** do but something that's done **to** us; something the Spirit does. It's a supernatural work. It's the difference between me trying to play basketball like Lebron James and me actually being reborn in the image of Lebron James. These legs will never jump like Lebron's legs, but if I could get reborn with Lebron's legs I might have a chance! When we trust Christ, we're reborn in Jesus' image.

The greatest thing about this truth is no one is out of reach. We should always be delighted but never surprised at who gets reborn. Have you ever found out someone became a Christian and you had a hard time believing it? Maybe someone from your past? What's she doing here? How could she be a Christian? If you knew what I knew about her, you wouldn't believe it either. But think about it. Without the Spirit, we're all nowhere with God. Sometimes we say, "Wow, God must have really had to work overtime to get him in the kingdom." What are we saying? Some people are born closer to God than others? We all start from ground zero when it comes to God.

The Holy Spirit frees us from fear and insecurity.

The Spirit not only frees us from spiritual blindness, but He also frees us from fear and insecurity. Just before He ascended, Jesus told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit fell on them. They did just that and the Spirit came on them in a tangible way. That's what we call Pentecost. It's recorded in Acts 2. Some people call that the "birthday of the church" because the pouring forth of the Spirit for the first time marked the beginning of the church. And that's symbolic of what happens to us the moment we trust Christ.

As you read on in Acts 2 you see that many unbelievers were watching when the Spirit fell and so Peter stood up and preached

the gospel. Look what happened next, "*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'*" (v. 37). You and I know someone was already at work in their lives, right? They wouldn't be "pierced to the heart" if the Spirit hadn't already been convicting them. But they'd yet to take that step of faith. They'd yet to be reborn. So look what Peter said, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (v. 38). This is the right response to the conviction of the Spirit: repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. By the way, baptism is the outward symbol to show you've put your trust in Jesus. If you're a believer and haven't been baptized, we invite you to do that on Easter Sunday, April 8.

Notice the Spirit is God's gift to everyone who places their trust in Jesus, and it's a gift you get when you believe. Every Christian has the gift of the Spirit. If you don't have the Spirit, you don't belong to Christ. You can be a Christian and quench the Spirit, or grieve the Spirit, but you can't be a Christian and be without the Spirit. Look at Romans 8:9, "*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.*" That's a very simple statement: if you don't have the Spirit, you don't belong to Christ. In 1 Cor. 12:13 he says, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*" Notice that word "all." Every believer has been baptized in the Spirit.

The fact is, if we don't have the Spirit we have no assurance we're saved at all. The presence of the Spirit in our lives is the guarantee that we belong to Him and have eternal life. Turn with me to Ephesians 1:13–14. "*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*"

Notice again the Spirit is given to those who believe. It says we're "*marked in him with a seal.*" This implies both security and ownership. It's like in the old days when our grandmothers canned preserves. They'd put the fruit in the jars and then pour wax over the fruit. Why? Because the wax sealed the jar tightly so the fruit wasn't contaminated. If she didn't seal it, the fruit would rot. We're God's preserves. What good would it do for God to redeem us if He didn't have a plan for preserving us as heirs of eternal life? Our salvation is secure because the Spirit seals us in Christ with His Spirit.

So this seal is about security, but it's also about identification. I lend out a lot of books. And I've learned that unless I put my seal on my books I may never see them again. So every once in a while I go into Rob Hall's library and find all the books I've lent

him! I know them because they have my seal on them. That's how God feels about us who have been marked with His seal.

Paul also says the Spirit is the *“deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.”* That word “deposit” means He's the down payment of our future inheritance. When you received the Spirit, God was saying, “Here's the first installment of your salvation. With this down payment I promise I'll deliver payment in full when we meet face to face.”

This is an amazing truth; a freeing truth: if you've truly placed your faith in Christ and received the Spirit of God then there's no way you can ever lose your salvation. God won't unseal what He's sealed for the day of redemption. God can't give you the down payment and then say, “I've decided not to pay up.” You don't have to live in fear of losing your eternal inheritance.

Someone might ask, “How do I know if I really have the Spirit in the first place?” This is where the Spirit's subjective work comes in. Listen to these words from Rom. 8:15–16, *“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”* The Spirit brings an inner testimony. Those who have the Spirit experience an intimacy with God by which they cry out, “Abba, Father.” There's an inner sense of belonging to Him; of being loved by Him.

This is why it's so important we live our lives yielded to the Spirit. If we don't, we lose that sense of assurance. Certainly, there are times in our walk with God we feel distant from Him. God may just be teaching us to walk by faith and not by sight. But there are times we lose assurance because we've ignored the Spirit's promptings. I love to hear my wife tell me she loves me. I never get tired of that. But if I'm not treating my wife right; if I'm ignoring her or taking her for granted, then she wouldn't be saying that to me. She'd still love me, but there'd be distance. And we'd have to deal with that before there could be that assurance again.

It's no different in our walk with God. The Spirit may be in your life, but you may also be experiencing a distance because there's an area of your life you haven't yielded to Him.

The Holy Spirit frees us from the power of sin.

This brings us to the next thing the Holy Spirit does: He frees us from the power of sin. Before the Spirit came into our lives, we were dominated by our sinful nature. The Bible calls that “the flesh.” The flesh is still something even those who have the Spirit have to contend with. Until we get our new bodies, we're in a battle with the flesh.

But it's not a battle we have to lose. We have the resources to win. Look at Romans 8:12–13. *“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according*

to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

Notice he says we're under obligation, not to live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The idea is we don't owe the flesh a thing. Our obligation is to the Spirit. He's the one who gave us new life. He's the one we should be listening to. It's like I have an obligation to listen to my family. If someone breaks into my home, I don't have an obligation to listen to them. The problem is so many of us for some reason think we're under obligation to the flesh and so we listen to the flesh. But our obligation is really to the Spirit so we should be listening to and nurturing His life within us. The more we listen and obey, the stronger that nature will grow.

You ask, well, how do I do that? Paul says *“by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body.”* Notice the balance here. On the one hand, **we** have to do it. We're the ones who put to death the deeds of the body. But, on the other hand, we can only do that by means of the Spirit. We have to cooperate with the work of the Spirit. We have to employ the Spirit to put the flesh to death.

Imagine I buy an elliptical machine to lose some weight. A few months later I take it back to the store and tell them it didn't work. I didn't lose one pound. The guy asks, “What's wrong with it? Didn't it work?” I tell him, “Well, I'm not really sure because I never got on it.” That sounds silly, but that's how many of us are in relationship to the Spirit. We have what we need to put the flesh to death. But we don't use it. And when nothing changes in our life, we blame God. “God, I prayed you would free me from this sin or that sin, but you didn't answer; it didn't work.” But being freed from any particular sin isn't something that happens to you automatically just because you have the equipment. We're not passive participants in the sanctification process. The Spirit works through our choices.

One of the things we have to do is learn to be sensitive to the Spirit and listen to Him. It's like the Dad who says to his son, “Max! Why didn't you answer me when I called you?” Max says, “I didn't hear you, Dad.” Then Dad asks, “What do you mean you didn't hear me?” Max doesn't respond, so Dad asks, “How many times didn't you hear me?” Max answers, “I don't know, maybe three or four times.”

Paul even gives us a motivation to respond to the Spirit. He says, *“If you live according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body you will live.”* He's talking about spiritual death. Death isn't something that comes at the end of life; it's something we experience now. Death is about fear, guilt, hostility, and emptiness. Fear can appear as worry, anxiety, dread, or timidity. Guilt can show up in your life as shame, self-hatred. Hostility will manifest itself as hate, resentment, or revenge. Emptiness shows up as loneliness,

discouragement, despair. These are symptoms of death. When the flesh cries out and it looks so good and seems so right, remember the result is death. But when we're filled with the Spirit, the result is life ("you will live"). That's the opposite of death. If death is fear, then life is trust, hope, and confidence. If death is guilt, then life is acceptance, security, assurance. If death is hostility, then life is love, kindness, reaching out. If death is emptiness, then life is a sense of well-being, fulfillment, excitement, fullness of life. Do you want life or death?

The Holy Spirit frees us from insignificance.

Finally, the Holy Spirit frees us from insignificance. In talking about the church as the body of Christ Paul says in 1 Cor. 12:7, *"Now to each one a manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."* He's talking about spiritual gifts. He goes on and lists several of the Spirit's gifts and then in v. 11 he caps it off by saying *"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one just as he determines."*

It's clear he wants us to use our gifts. Listen to Romans 12:6–8, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."*

If this is your church home, let me ask you a pointed question: are you a consumer or a giver? I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about the difference between being served and serving others. As a church, we're growing. More people are showing up here than ever before. We thank God for that. But that's **not** the measure of a successful church. Honestly, anyone can draw a crowd. The measure of a successful church isn't how many people you can get to show up on Sunday, but how many of those people are growing in their faith and using their spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ. One of the challenges we face as elders and pastors is how to facilitate that. The temptation is to just hire more and more people on our staff to do the work because you can always find people to do something if you're willing to pay them. But we don't want to do that because sometimes by hiring someone we're taking away the opportunity for someone to step up and use their gifts. The church isn't about a

few highly trained professionals doing the work of ministry. It's about every member of the body doing the ministry by using our gifts.

Right now, we estimate about 38% of the people who attend CPC are serving in some capacity. I know some of you use your gifts outside this body; that's great. I also know many use their gifts but not in a formal capacity that might be counted. But even with those things in mind, we have a long way to go. Here's a question to ask yourself: what would this church look like if everyone was as committed as you? If everyone gave and served like you do, would the church be stronger or weaker?

You say, "Well, I've never been trained." Training can help, but remember you've been given equipped by the Spirit. Or you say, "I don't know enough." Knowledge can help. We have all kinds of learning opportunities here. But, we also have plenty of things you can do without knowing the Bible inside and out. Or you say, "I don't have time." To that I'd say, "Yes, you do!" We all have the same amount of time, it's just a matter of what we choose to do with it. The Bible says to redeem the time because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15). It's like if you want to do something productive with your time you have to redeem it. There's a price to be paid for it.

Some of you still aren't convinced you have much to offer. But anything you choose to do in dependence on the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ makes a difference. An African proverb says, "If you think you're too small to make a difference, try spending the night in a closed room with a mosquito."

Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. The Spirit frees us from spiritual blindness to believe in Jesus and be born again. He frees us from fear and insecurity by indwelling us and marking us with His seal. He frees us from the power of sin by giving us the ability to choose life. He frees us from insignificance by giving us the ability to serve.

I want to close today by simply challenging you to pray the following prayer every day this next week: Holy Spirit, may I have more of you as you have more of me.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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