

The Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters

7. We Believe ... In the Holy Spirit

Sunday, February 27, 2005
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.
Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

O God, who taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Book of Common Prayer

Modified from: Collect for the Day of Pentecost, p. 227

THE CREED



WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE
AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Introduction

- **We believe in the Holy Spirit,**
- **the Lord, the giver of life,**
- **who proceeds from the Father and the Son.**
- **With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.**
- **He has spoken through the Prophets.**

Introduction

The Holy Spirit

- We understand the **Holy Spirit** to be both a **Power** and a **Person**.
 - This understanding is a revelation of the richness of the inner life of God, the life of a triune God

Introduction

The Holy Spirit and Us

- The Holy Spirit is the means by which:
 - We experience the power of the resurrected Jesus, who is enthroned at the right hand side of the Father.
 - We are being transformed throughout our lives into the likeness of God.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit and the Church

- Since we are the Church – the community of God’s people on earth – it is fitting for the Creed to discuss the Holy Spirit before it deals with the Church.
 - *With* the Holy Spirit, the Church is a sacrament of God’s presence in the world.
 - *Without* the Holy Spirit, the Church is simply another human organization among many.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit and Revelation

- God is the Living God, and God's revelation:
 - Is not confined to the past.
 - Cannot be adequately contained in human words — including the words of Scripture.
- God continues to reveal God's self through God's creation and through our experience of the Holy Spirit.
- God's continuing revelation does not reject earlier revelation, but deepens and extends it.

**We Believe in the
Holy Spirit**

- **We believe in the Holy Spirit,**
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We Believe in the Holy Spirit

Equal to the Father and the Son

- The introductory phrasing in the Creed immediately makes it clear the Holy Spirit should be thought of in the same manner as the Father and the Son:
 - **We believe in one God, the Father ...**
 - **We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ ...**
 - **We believe in the Holy Spirit ...**

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

“Spirit” and “Holy”

- The **Holy Spirit** was the source of the experience and conviction of early Christians that Jesus is resurrected and exalted the right hand of God:

No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by [or in] the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

- This “Resurrection experience” and conviction *empowered* the early Christians, that is: *filled them with power* (the power of the Holy Spirit)

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

“Spirit” and “Holy”

■ “Spirit”

- The term “**Spirit**” tells us the *kind* of power.
- It was not military, economic, or political power, but a power that transformed their “spirit” = their capacities for knowing and loving.
- The early Christians recognized that a power that could transform their own “spirit” must itself be “Spirit.”

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

“Spirit” and “Holy”

■ “Holy”

- The term “**holy**” tells us the *source* of the power.
- The power that transformed their spirit was not from within themselves, but was a transcendent presence beyond them.
- For only God can fundamentally transform human beings:
“Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me; do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit away from me.” LXX Psalm 50:12-13.

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

A Power and a Person

- Early Christian writings speak of the Holy Spirit primarily as a transforming **Power** at work in us. Two examples (out of many):
 - Rom 15:13: “**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**” (NRSV)
 - Rom. 8:11: “**If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.**” (NRSV)

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

A Power and a Person

- Early Christian writings however also speak of this transforming **Power** in language that suggests a **Person**. For example:
 - being led by the spirit (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 5:18)
 - Spirit praying (Rom. 8:26)
 - Spirit showing love (Rom. 15:30)
 - Spirit searching (1 Cor. 2:10)
 - Spirit knowing (1 Cor. 2:11)
 - Spirit teaching (1 Cor. 2:13)
 - Spirit speaking (1 Tim. 4:1)
 - Spirit testifying (Hebrews 10:15)

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

A Power and a Person

- The later Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (the sequel to Luke's gospel, and often called the "Book of the Holy Spirit") also speak of the Spirit both as a **Power** and a **Person**.

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

A Rich Ambiguity

- What we do *not* find in the New Testament is a clear sense of the distinct identity of the Spirit. The Spirit is variously described as the:
 - “Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead” [i.e. the Father].
 - “Spirit of God’s Son,” or “Spirit of Christ,” or “Spirit of Jesus Christ.”
 - “Spirit of God,” or “Spirit from God,” or “Spirit of the Living God.”

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

A Rich Ambiguity

- What is important to the authors of the New Testament is that “the Spirit touches us personally with the personal presence of God through the resurrection of Jesus.” (p. 223)
 - It is through later revelation, through the experience of Christians living in the Spirit, that we have learned of the distinct identity of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord, the Giver of Life

- We believe in the Holy Spirit,
- **the Lord, the giver of life,**
- who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
- With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
- He has spoken through the Prophets.

The Lord, the Giver of Life

Giver of Life

- The New Testament has a broadly held conviction that through Jesus' Resurrection, God gives us the gift of **“eternal life” = a share in God's own life.**
- Only God can give a share in God's own life.
- The New Testament tells us that this gift of life is the work of the **Holy Spirit.**

The Lord, the Giver of Life

Giver of Life

- 1 Corinthians 15:45: “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving **Spirit**.”
- John 6:63: Jesus tells the disciples: “It is the **Spirit** that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are **Spirit** and life.”

The Lord, the Giver of Life

Lord

- Only God can give us “eternal life,” = a share in God’s own life.
- The **Holy Spirit**, the giver of life then, is also **God** = is **Lord**.
 - (Lord = *Adonai*, substituted for the holy name of God, YHWH / Yahweh, in the Hebrew Scriptures)
- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: “**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory of another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.**” (NRSV)

The Lord, the Giver of Life

Lord

- The equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as God are seen in Jesus' final commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV)

The Lord, the Giver of Life

Conclusion

- When we say the **Holy Spirit is Lord, the Giver of Life**, we are declaring that the Holy Spirit, the Power and Person that transforms our lives, is:
 - A manifestation of the same God that creates us and saves us.
 - “Saves us” means: gives us “eternal life” = a share in God’s own life. In other words, the **Holy Spirit is the Giver of Life**.

Who Proceeds From the Father and the Son

- **We believe in the Holy Spirit,**
- **the Lord, the giver of life,**
- **who proceeds from the Father and the Son.**
- **With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.**
- **He has spoken through the Prophets.**

From the Father and the Son Going Too Far?

- Dr. Johnson suggests this statement in the Creed was not needed and “overstepped what humans strictly can say about the inner life of God and provided the occasion for theological hairsplitting and therefore for division.” (p. 228)

From the Father and the Son

Going Too Far?

- Original Creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 had only the Holy Spirit as **“the one who is coming out of the Father.”**
 - Alludes to John 15:26, The Spirit of truth **“who is coming out from the Father.”**
- The Creed affirms that the Son and the Spirit are not made by the Father, but are “out of” the Father, and therefore divine.

From the Father and the Son

Double Procession

- Some believers felt the Scripture implied a “**double procession**” of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit “came out” or “proceeded” from the Father *and* the Son, not just the Father.
- They cited references to:
 - “**The Spirit of the Son**” (Gal. 4:6)
 - “**The Spirit of Christ**” (Rom. 8:9)
 - “**The Spirit of Jesus Christ**” (Phil 1:19)

From the Father and the Son

The *Filioque* Clause

- In 589, the Latin (Western Church) added the Latin *filioque* clause “and the Son” to the Creed at the Third Council of Toledo – without consultation with the Eastern Church.
- This became a bitter dispute between the Western and Eastern Churches, that was mired with the political rivalry between the eastern Byzantine Empire and the western Holy Roman Empire.

From the Father and the Son

The *Filioque* Clause

- The dispute over the *filioque* clause was one of the causes of the schism between the Eastern and Western church in 1054 A.D.

From the Father and the Son

The *Filioque* Clause

- Dr. Johnson: there is only a bit of substance to the debate:
 - *East can say*: the oneness of God is obscured if there is more than one fount of divinity in the Godhead.
 - *West can say*: the Father and Son are of one being, and so the procession of the Spirit must be in common between the Father and the Son.
- Overall however, the debate is a scandal, “theology at its worst, as a form of word-chopping with little real contact with living faith.” (p. 231)

From the Father and the Son

The *Filioque* Clause

- Dr. Johnson has no theological problem saying the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, but suggests we should think of it the way Paul thought about eating meat if it would give offense to others:
“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.” (Romans 14:15)

From the Father and the Son

The *Filioque* Clause

- Just as “**the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking**” (Rom. 14:17), neither is the kingdom of God a matter of getting the procession of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity correct.
- Dr. Johnson: “If my fellow Christian is offended by *filioque*, then I have no need to say it ever again.” (p. 231)

**With the Father and
the Son He is
Worshiped and
Glorified**

- **We believe in the Holy Spirit,**
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Worshiped and Glorified

Worshiped

- God *alone* is worthy of our worship.
 - When tempted by Satan, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 **“You shall worship the Lord your God; him alone shall you serve.”** (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8)
- As God, the Holy Spirit is due the same homage as the Father and the Son.

Worshiped and Glorified

Glorified

- God *alone* is worthy of being glorified.
- To “glorify:”
 - Greek word is *doxa* (glory, honor) and *doxazein* (to glorify, to honor)
 - The Greek *doxa* is also used to translate the Hebrew word *kabod*, which carries with it connotations of *presence and power*.
 - *kabod Yahweh* = the “glory of God” also points to the presence and power of God.

Worshiped and Glorified

Glorified

- To “glorify” God in the New Testament means:
 - To honor and praise God, but also:
 - “... to acknowledge God’s presence and power and its claim upon humans.” (p. 234)

**He Spoke Through
the Prophets**

- **We believe in the Holy Spirit,**
- **the Lord, the giver of life,**
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He Spoke Through the Prophets

The Basis of Our Knowledge of God

- Every statement of the Creed relies on the truth of this affirmation.
- If God does not reveal God's self through the words and actions and lives of others (does not speak through prophets), then:
 - The concept of “divine revelation” is empty.
 - Everything we think we know about God, including Scripture, is built on a worthless foundation, and is therefore a delusion.

He Spoke Through the Prophets

A Prophetic Religion

- Christianity (like Judaism and Islam) is a *prophetic* religion.
- A **prophet** is *not* someone who predicts the future, but someone who speaks to other human beings for God and from God's perspective.
 - Because they see the meaning God sees, and interpret from God's perspective, they are frequently at odds with their fellow human beings.

He Spoke Through the Prophets

A Prophetic Religion

- To believe in **prophecy** is to believe that the God who creates the world at every moment:
 - Created us “in God’s image” with the capacity to communicate with God, to see and hear the world from God’s perspective.
 - Uses human beings (“prophets”) so created “in God’s image” to communicate God’s perspective in the world.
 - Our communication with God, and our communication with others of God’s perspective, is through *new capabilities of knowing and loving* (= of Spirit) given us by God who is Spirit, who is present throughout all of creation, who is present in the interior of all.

He Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and Scripture

- A belief in **Prophecy** (= the Holy Spirit speaks through “prophets”) has important implications for Scripture:
 - The *same* Holy Spirit speaks through the “prophets” in both the Old and New Testaments.
 - We must regard and read Scripture as *prophetic*, “inspired by God,” (2 Tim. 3:16), “God-breathed.”

He Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and Scripture

- To regard and read Scripture as *prophetic* means:
 - we *cannot* not read them merely in their historical context, but
 - we must read them as *speaking for God* in our own age and life.
- To be open to this “prophetic voice” of the Scripture is to allow the same Holy Spirit that breathes through these texts to also breathe in our human hearts and minds as we read.

He Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and the Church

- A belief in prophecy has implications for the Church (= the community of God's people):
 - 1. the Church must discern the voices of prophets within it, raised up by God in *every* age to challenge it to greater integrity.
 - 2. The Church's *primary* mission is:
 - Not to win adherents (success = growth), but
 - To bear faithful, prophetic witness to God's perspective and claim on the world (success = fidelity).

He Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and the Church

- A belief in prophecy has implications for the Church (= the community of God's people):
 - 3. The Holy Spirit can speak through prophets in any time and place, often *outside* the Church.
 - So the Church must be willing to listen for the word of God written "on the subway walls," in all movements of protest and reform that are true to the good news of Jesus.

Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and the Believer

- A belief in prophecy has important implications for each Christian.
- The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us, enabling us to be “prophets,” to be witnesses to the perspective of God.
- “God is Holy:” describes the absolute otherness of God, who is utterly different from the world. Yet God asks us (Lev. 11:44): **“Be ye holy as I am holy.”**

Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and the Believer

- We must be transformed by the Spirit of God, and be “holy” = “other” = different *within* the world.
- Our model for a life transformed through the Holy Spirit is Jesus.
- Our growth in holiness (= sanctification) means to grow in conformity to the “mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16, Phil 2:5).

Spoke Through the Prophets

Belief in Prophecy and the Believer

- Conformity to the “mind of Christ” means believers must:
 - “translate into the circumstances of their lives the same attitudes and dispositions,
 - the same pattern of radical obedience toward God,
 - and radical self-giving to others,
 - that formed the character of the human Jesus.” (p. 247)
- By so doing (becoming **holy**), we will embody the work of the Holy Spirit in our words and actions (= the Holy Spirit will speak through us = we will become prophets)

The Life of the Triune God

The Life of the Triune God

- There is an infinite distance between our words and the God of which we try to speak.
- We must resist the temptation to think that because we can describe God with our words, that we have captured reality.
- We do not know much about God. “We have not so much come to know God as we have had the experience of coming to be known by God.” (p. 249).

The Life of the Triune God

- Yet we do affirm that we have some hint about the nature of God in our human experience of God in creation:
 - God as creator and sustainer, redeemer, sanctifier.
 - God as Father, as Jesus Christ, and as the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
- We believe these faces of God reflect a dimension of God's inner life called to outward expression in God's relationship with us.
- "We proclaim God as triune because that is how we have experienced God, indeed how God has been revealed to us." (p. 252)

The Life of the Triune God

- The Christian sense of monotheism thus differs from Judaism and Islam.
- All three religions agree that there is but one source of all reality, and this source is the creator, savior and judge of that reality.
- Judaism and Islam however accuse Christianity of slipping towards polytheism.
 - Judaism: Christians believed in “two powers in heaven”
 - Islam: Christians gave partners to Allah.

The Life of the Triune God

- “What the mystery of the trinity discloses is not a mathematical problem (how can one be three?) but the mystery of life given and shared. The trinity is the mystery of God’s own life as life given and received and shared in a never-diminished abundance of being. The trinity shows us God as community.” (p. 250)

The Life of the Triune God

- Imagining God's inner life as communitarian suggests:
 - God's creation was an overflowing of divine energy seeking expression and love.
 - God's gift of self in Jesus was an external expression of the same self-giving love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.