



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 4.4 – The Triune God Revealed in His Word – God the Holy Spirit**

IV. The Triune God Revealed In His Word

Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier (the One who sets us apart as believers in Christ). His function in our salvation is to enlighten our dark and sinful hearts. To accomplish this, He uses the Gospel (the good news of salvation through Jesus) to create saving faith and give the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit creates believers in Christ through his gracious working in the heart of the sinner. Scripture calls this change from unbeliever to believer *regeneration*, that is, a new birth (cf. John 3:1ff).

No one, by his own strength of mind or will, can do anything except resist and reject the life-giving Gospel. No one, by his own power, can choose to believe in Christ. The Apostle Paul told believers, in reviewing their former spiritual condition: *“You were dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ephesians 2:1). So we recognize that no one is able to “accept Christ” or “welcome Him into his heart” by his own reason or strength. The sinner receives and accepts the blessing of his justification only through the faith which the Holy Spirit creates.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of those in whom He has created faith, sanctifying them day by day. The Spirit empowers them to live before God as His children according to His revealed will and enables them to crucify the sinful urges that still cling to them in this life.

1 Corinthians 12:3: *No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:4-5: *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

1 Corinthians 3:16: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Ephesians 2:10: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Galatians 5:22-24: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Romans 10:17: *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Comments:

Jesus has already saved us from our sins and won for us and all sinners eternal life through His life, death, and resurrection. What need is there now for the Holy Spirit and His work? Martin Luther answers this question in his Large Catechism: “Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in Him and receive Him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost” (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 436).

Forgiveness of sins has been won for all. But in order for someone to receive this gift, they to know about it and to trust in it. The apostle Paul wrote: **“We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law”** (Romans 3:28). Jesus said: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3: 14-15). The apostle Paul wrote: **“How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Romans 10:14) **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

It is the Holy Spirit’s work to bring the Good News of Jesus to the world through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word when it is written and spoken, and in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As Paul stated emphatically: **“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Holy Spirit works through God’s law to show us our sins. He works through the Gospel to show us our Savior Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us to faith and to trust in Jesus and His work. In this way, the forgiveness that Jesus won for the whole world becomes ours personally and individually. This work of the Holy Spirit can be called sanctification: calling us out of the world of sinners and making us holy in God’s sight through the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit’s work can be called conversion: turning a sinner from the way that leads away from God to the way that leads to eternal life through faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s work can also be called regeneration, or being born again, as Peter says: **“Born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”** (1 Peter 1:23).

The Holy Spirit’s work can also be called being made alive, as Ephesians 2:4-5 says: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”** Sinners can do nothing to give themselves this new life. They cannot decide by their own will to start believing in Jesus. Faith in Jesus as Savior is a gift of God’s love the Holy Spirit creates through the Word of God. That is why the Bible so often says that we are saved by grace. Our coming to faith in Jesus is entirely a work of God, and we cannot contribute anything to help in the work of conversion or regeneration.

Today there are so many preachers who tell sinners that they themselves must make the decision to believe in Jesus, and only then can they receive the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. These evangelists say, in effect: “If you believe in Jesus, your sins will be forgiven. It is up to you to make this decision.” But as we have seen, those who are dead in sin cannot decide to believe. Rather, God’s Word teaches us to say to sinners: “You deserve eternal death because of your sins. But God has sent His Son, Jesus, to live and die in your place. God forgives you your sins because of what Jesus did. God invites you to come to Jesus and believe in Him and what He has done for you and for all sinners.” This invitation in itself, because it is the Word of God, has the power within itself to create faith in Jesus Christ. Only the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word can begin a new spiritual life in the heart of the believer.

This invitation of the Holy Spirit through the Word can be rejected. If it is rejected, the fault is not with the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. God earnestly want all sinners to be saved. The fault is not with the Word of God either. The fault is in the person who rejects God’s gift of salvation in Jesus. Jesus said to those who rejected Him in Jerusalem: **“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!”** (Luke 13:34). On the other hand, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, it is entirely a work of God and matter of God’s undeserved grace.

When the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to faith in Christ, He enters the heart of that believer and makes the believer’s body His home. **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (1 Corinthians 3:16). From this point on, the believer has two forces at work within him: the new man created by the Holy Spirit and the old man, or the old Adam. The new man is sometimes called “spirit”, and the old man is sometimes called “flesh”. The apostle Paul wrote to

the Galatians: **“The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”** (Galatians 5:17). This conflict between flesh and spirit continues throughout a believer’s life on earth.

The sinful flesh continues to work in the believer to cause him to sin in thought, word, and deed. If the flesh gains control and drives out the Holy Spirit, the believer becomes once again an unbeliever. Contrary to what many teach in other churches, it is possible for a believer to lose his faith. Jesus taught this fact clearly when He said in His parable of the sower and his seed: **“The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away”** (Luke 8:13).

The Holy Spirit works a change of attitude in the believer. In a believer, the Holy Spirit produces good fruits – the fruits of the Spirit, or the fruits of faith – such as **“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** (Galatians 5:22-23). The good that we do as believers in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, as Paul says: **“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:10). Our good works come from God, who works in us, not from ourselves.

When we are brought to faith in Christ our sinful flesh is crucified. Nevertheless, the flesh continues to assert itself, and it must be crucified over and over again in our daily lives. The Holy Spirit works in us through the law and Gospel. He reminds us over and over again through God’s word that we are sinners who deserve eternal death but God in His love for us sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world and that in Jesus we have forgiveness and the sure promise of eternal life. In this way our spiritual life is renewed each day. It is Holy Spirit who keeps us steadfast in the faith until the end of our lives so that we are brought into our eternal inheritance.

In his Large Catechism Martin Luther concludes his discussion of the Holy Spirit and His work by saying: **“The Holy Spirit continues His work without ceasing until the Last Day, and for this purpose He has appointed a community (or congregation) on earth, through which He speaks and does all His work. For He has not yet gathered together all of this Christian community, nor has He completed the granting of forgiveness. Therefore, we believe in Him who daily brings us into this community through the Word, and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins. Then when His work has been finished and we abide in it, having died to the world and all misfortune, He will finally make us perfectly and eternally holy”** (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 439).

Questions

1. Why do we still need the Holy Spirit even though Jesus has finished His work?
2. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. What are some of the names given to the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the only way in which sinners can receive Jesus’ forgiveness?
5. What does the Holy Spirit use to carry out His work?
6. Why is it important to remember that sinners by nature are dead in sin?
7. What word does the Bible use to emphasize that our salvation is entirely a gift of God that we do not deserve?
8. What struggle continues in a Christian as long as he lives on earth?
9. What is the difference between the works of flesh and the fruits of the Spirit?
10. Who should receive all the credit when a person believes in Jesus and continues in that faith until his dying day?
11. Whose fault is it when a person rejects the Gospel or loses his faith in Jesus?