

## Lead 360- Session III: Christian Beliefs in Jesus the Christ & the Holy Spirit

### Review:

Thus far we have sought to identify and understand *that* God is, *who* He is, what He does, and His purpose in creating humans. We have affirmed His reality, considered His mysterious incomprehensibility AND his relationality. We have identified His creative purposes in making us in such a way we are able to have fellowship with Him, one another, and His creation. We have affirmed that the heart of Christian belief about God and in God is that He is triune. The one God has revealed himself in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This central belief in the Trinity is biblically based and clarified in Christian history.

We want to avoid overstating the threeness in the Trinity and coming up with tritheism. Ask Mormons if they believe in the Trinity and they will say “yes”. Ask them what they mean by Trinity and eventually you will see they believe in three individual gods. If you challenge them, they will probably ask you, “If the Trinity came to dinner at your house, how many plates would you place on the table?” This is exactly the kind of oversimplification that not only is a theological caricature, but indicative of the problem the early heretics had of trying to make sense of the Trinity. He is One and Three. Let the mystery stand and worship the triune God! Don’t allow yourself to knuckle under someone’s obligation to make this belief rational. We have focused on the triune God’s desire that we mirror His image in our lives and in our churches even as we realized how sin distorts and tries to destroy God’s purposes. Now we move to study Christology to reaffirm how God has chosen to redeem us unto Himself. We will arbitrarily study the identity of Christ (His person) before moving to consider His mission (cross/atonement). Do keep in mind His identity/mission are inseparable (except for the necessity of “orderly” discussion). In the second part of this session, we study Christian belief in the Holy Spirit.

### Part I – Christian Belief in Jesus the Christ

#### I. Introduction

Let's seek to understand Christian belief in Jesus as the Christ. Who is Jesus? Our Lord himself asked his disciples that question 2000 years ago (Matthew 16:13-20), and we still need to answer it today. "Who is Jesus Christ for *us today*?" The Bible proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, meaning “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). How can we best confess his identity today in faithful continuity with the Scriptures and orthodox Christianity? We will look briefly at some of the misunderstandings in history which are still around today. We cannot fully understand who Jesus is apart from knowing why he came and what he accomplished. What was and is his mission? He came to save us by dying for us and to show and enable us how to live to please God so that we may have abundant life now and forever. We will see that there are many biblical images about the meaning of the cross. It is hugely important that we discuss the cross in the context of Christ’s resurrection and

his promised return if we are to be faithful to Scripture in describing who he is, what he has done, what he continues to do and finally will do in his second coming.

Alister McGrath speaks for the consensus of belief about Jesus as the Christ: "Christianity is Christ", without Christ, there is no Christianity. (1) He is the definitive starting and ending point for Christianity upon whom all Christian theology depends and rests. (2) He reveals God. (3) He provides salvation. (4) He defines, shapes and enables the Christian life, his church, and last things. While Christology is not the sum total of Christian theology, we could say that the Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ defines and clarifies all Christian theology. Daniel Migliore says, "theological reflection on any topic is *Christian* to the extent that it recognizes the centrality of Jesus Christ and the salvation he brings" (p. 139).

It is Christ which makes Christianity distinct from all other world religions. We call ourselves Christians because of who Jesus Christ is and because of our relationship to Him. Most other world religions have been greatly influenced by their founders. Judaism was vastly influenced by Moses, yet no devout Jew would think of Moses as the founder of Judaism. Likewise no Muslim would see Muhammad as a personal Saviour. But for us as Christians, it is different. Without Christ, we have no religious faith. We must never forget that Christ is always greater in reality than he can ever be in our theological reflection. Moravian Zinzendorf often said, "We have a great need for Christ, and we have a great Christ for our need."

Some normal questions (maybe speculative) which prompt Christological reflection include the following: (1) As to his saving power: how can someone who lived that long ago be significant for us today? (2) As to his nature: how can one person be both divine and human? Is his humanity still real? (3) Can one claim to be a Christian yet not affirm his divinity and/or humanity? (4) What of the possibility of his having illness, sexual temptation, a potential for sinning? In every generation of our Christian heritage, Christians have confessed that Jesus is Lord, and that He is the Only One who can save us. Many people have difficulty believing this today, some of them even call themselves Christians. The "scandal of Christ's particularity" as God's exclusive means of salvation is no less controversial today than it was in the first century world. I cannot overemphasize to you the importance of what we believe about Jesus Christ.

## **II. Identity of Jesus the Christ: His Person**

In the early centuries of Christian history, much attention was given trying to understand Christ's nature. The heretics misunderstood thus prompting the apostolic leaders to give concentrated theological attention to the matter. We will see many controversies over his nature which will be of primary interest until the Protestant reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; at that point much attention was given to the redemptive mission (atonement, cross) of Christ. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Christians have given greater emphasis to understanding the balance between his deity and his humanity.

### **1. Jesus is Deity, He is God**

Christianity and the church of Jesus Christ is founded on the truth that Jesus is God incarnate, God with us. As Jesus' followers in the N.T. thought about his teachings, his miracles and reflected upon his life, death and resurrection, they affirmed that he is truly God and Saviour as Peter put it (2 Peter 1:1). In the first five centuries of Christianity, Christians kept going back to the Scriptures seeking to understand Jesus' deity. Following attacks by liberal theology at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and America, the Fundamentalist movement early in the 20<sup>th</sup> insisted on the virginal conception of Jesus (virgin birth) as proof of his deity and also a necessary belief to call oneself a Christian. But the Bible does not present the miracle of his conception as proof He is God, rather it is the miracle of his resurrection that establishes who he is (Rom. 1;1-3). The early church did not have to battle with doubters about his virginal conception, though it is clearly affirmed in Matthew and Luke. The biggest battle over Jesus in the early centuries was the fact he was *born* as a man, not born of a virgin.

As we learned in the earlier session on the Trinity, the question of Jesus' relationship to God the Father came to a fever pitch in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The church council at Nicea in 325 A.D. rejected Arius' understanding that Jesus was created by God and thus was a type of "divine creature", neither fully human nor fully divine. Arius saw Christ as subordinate to the one supreme God. Nicea served the dual purpose of confirming the full deity of Jesus, his equality with God and was a major milestone toward trinitarian belief. The convincing point made by Athanasius that if Jesus is not God, we have no Saviour saved the day for Christian belief in Jesus Christ at Nicea. The Holy Spirit would be recognized as having full deity and a member of the Trinity by 381 A.D.

Prior to Nicea, there other heresies besides the one held by Arius, and the heretical view of Arius did nearly become the majority view in the Roman Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The first major heretical misunderstanding about Jesus was a gnostic idea. Since they believed the human body to be evil, they said Jesus only "seemed" to be human. They had no problem with his divinity but they rejected him as a genuine human being. There was also an early Jewish heresy held by the Ebionites which said that Jesus was *only* a good man made holy by his close relationship to God, but he was not believed to be divine. Then there was a heresy among the Greek theologians that insisted Jesus was only temporarily divine. He was born human, then when the Spirit came upon him at his baptism, he assumed divinity, but while he was on the cross, God withdrew that divinity so he could die. This view went by the name adoptionism; Jesus was temporarily adopted as the Son of God. All of these heresies lurked in the background as church leaders met at Nicea and settled the question of Jesus' deity. They believed that Jesus is fully divine because he is Lord and because he reveals God to us. Jesus said, *He who has seen me, has seen the Father* (John 14:9).

What does it mean to affirm His divinity? (1) Because His divine nature is the same as God's He is the only authentic revelation of God the Father (John 14:9). (2) The fullness of Deity dwells in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He is truly God. (3) His Sonship is eternal and unique (John 1:1, 18; 8:58; Heb. 1:3). (4) His offer and pronouncement of

forgiveness of sins is NOT blasphemy but the gift of God's grace. (5) He is worthy of worship (Rev. 5). (6) His promise of ultimate triumph is secured by God Himself (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

After they confirmed Jesus was truly God of “very God” and “from God” as they put it, questions arose about Jesus’ humanity. Jesus was fully God, but what kind of humanity did he have (or could he have)? Was it completely like ours? If so what kept him from committing sin?

## **2. Jesus is fully human.**

When we turn to our New Testaments, we do not find a biography of Jesus’ life. There are too many details missing, but what we do have are clear testimonies as to who Jesus was and is and what that means. We are told that he was all things human except that sinful condition in which we find ourselves. Though he was constantly and fiercely tempted to sin, he did not. It was at this point of the question of his capacity to sin that prompted another church council in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Apollinarius said he believed that Jesus was fully God but that he did not have the same type of human soul or spirit we do. His thinking was that the Logos, the principle of the universe, replaced that part of Jesus’ humanity, and that that was necessary to keep Jesus from sinning. His novel idea was accepted for a while, then many of the church fathers realized that if Jesus wasn’t and isn’t like us in every way except sin, he cannot save us. The conclusion was reached that what Jesus “had not assumed, he could not heal” (Gregory of Nazianus). In other words, if he was not God, he could not save us, likewise if he were not fully human, how could he be a perfect human sacrifice for sin for us? Apollinarius, despite his good intentions, was labeled a heretic and the council in 381 affirmed the full humanity of Christ and also re-affirmed his deity. The biblical “explanation” for Jesus’ sinlessness is His perfect obedience to the Father.

What helped persuade the church fathers to disagree with Apollinarius were the many N. T. descriptions of Jesus’ humanity especially as found in the gospels. Jesus was thoroughly Jewish in his heritage and culture. He fully experienced the human limitations of hunger, thirst, fatigue, grief and even not knowing everything. Luke tells us he grew and matured physically as well as intellectually (Luke 2:40). He even matured spiritually as evidenced by his remarkable prayer life. He knew the heights of public acclaim and the depths of human rejection. He knew what it was like to be denied, betrayed, condemned, humiliated, tortured and even crucified. No one in human history has experienced humanity more than Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, He is the most human person who ever lived on this earth.

Without question, Jesus is fully human. But if we only think of only human in his person, as important as that humanity is, we have missed something significant for us today. Jesus makes possible a new humanity. Paul calls him the “new Adam” that not only shows God’s original plan and purpose for human beings, but gets it done in a definitively God kind of way. Jesus not only shows us how to live but through the Holy Spirit enables us to live a Christ-like life. This does not mean we give time and energy

trying to figure out “what would Jesus do”? Rather, it means we through the power of the Holy Spirit seek to obey the teachings he already has made clear in the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the Bible.

What does it mean to affirm His humanity? (1) Jesus' atoning death can truly avail for us as the high priest who gave himself for us. (2) He can truly sympathize with us and intercede for us; He understands. (3) He manifests the true nature of humanity as the only One who never sinned. (4) He is our example and power source. (5) Human nature can be affirmed as good because of Jesus. (6) God is not exclusively transcendent (John 1.14). i. Only a human Jesus can atone for humans. ii. Only a divine Christ can relate to God.

If he is really fully divine and fully human, and these are two distinctive natures, how can they cohere in *one* person? This was the key question the church sought to answer in the 5th century. Another heretic, a church leader named Eutyches thought he had Jesus figured out. He insisted that his two natures blended together as one, the divine.

### **3. Jesus is both human and divine in one person.**

We come face to face with another great mystery when we affirm Jesus as fully human and fully divine in one personal unity. This is the astonishing claim that somehow two natures are found in Jesus as one unique person. The last of the best known church councils gathered to challenge the misunderstanding of Eutyches of the blending of Christ's natures. The council was held at a place called Chalcedon (451 A.D.), which is located in modern-day Turkey. Several ideas were proposed but the Christological insights of Leo, the bishop of the church at Rome, finally won the day. Leo insisted that it was better to say what the union of Christ's two natures did NOT mean: they were not separated, blended, confused or changed. These adverbs did not clearly explain what exactly it means to confess Jesus as having two natures in one person, but at least they attempted to protect the mystery of Christ's personal unity. Leo helped satisfy the council when he pointed out that in Christ we find God without any detriment to Jesus' humanity, and humanity without any detriment to his divinity. In other words, in this historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, deity and humanity meet in perfect union when the Lord of the universe who was equal with God humbled himself and became a human being.

His two natures are distinct yet neither His humanity nor His divinity infringe upon the other. “He takes that which is ours (human) without depleting that which is His” (deity). In light of biblical teachings about Jesus, there are several theological non-negotiables: (1) The fullness of God dwells in Jesus bodily (Col 2.9). His full humanity and full divinity in cohere in one Person; (2) Christ's preexistence (John 1.18; 8.58) stress his uniqueness and finality. (3) His Sonship is unique; only He is uniquely divine, uniquely human (John 3.16). We will affirm later: (4) The historical reality of Jesus' resurrection and the hope it engenders.

What is the relationship of his two natures in one Person? (1) *Negatively*, it does NOT mean: i. Jesus is two distinct persons (Nestorianism); ii. That His humanity was absorbed into his deity (Eutychianism); iii. Or that Jesus is a human who became God (adoptionism); iv. Or that Christ is a double personality, two wills or two energies; v. Nor that His two natures are absorbed by each other nor are they blended or merged into each other. (2) *Positively*, it means: i. The God-Man begins at incarnation and His priestly function continues today; He remains "human" (though not flesh) in His "ascendedness". ii. There is the need to focus on details of his historical life and also acknowledge the unfathomable, non-analogical mystery of His Person. He is God AND man, a very important "conjunction." He is a unity of person; Jesus is the God-Man (3) This is difficult to Understand, Yes...i. Because of combination of two natures which poses a paradox (for our understanding); ii. Because of the theological affirmation required due to the paucity of explicit biblical teaching.

There are no biblical references as to duality (two divided persons) in Jesus' personal unity. He is "one unified person whose acts presuppose both humanity and divinity" (John 1.1, 14; Gal 4.4, 1 Tim 3.16). iii. His work is that of one person (1John 2.1-2; 4.2; 4.14-15). iv. The gospel accounts assume both the "naturalness" of how Jesus lived and ministered yet "no one spoke like this man" and "even the demons obey him" and He raises the dead, stills the storms and cleanses the Jewish temple. (4) Guard closely the biblical witness to Christ's deity and humanity. The unity of His Person and the integrity of His two natures are complex and mysterious yet vital to affirming Who He is. Chalcedon represents an enormous leap forward and is basic to understanding what God has done for us. Yet the "Chalcedonian adverbs" say more to us about who he *isn't* than Who He. Our "how so" question once again begs the depth and wonder of the mind and power of God and demonstrates once again how human logic of the western variety simply does not like mystery

What does the His incarnation *mean*? (1) The initiative in the incarnation is God's, not a matter of a human becoming God nor deity being added to humanity. (2) To redeem humanity, Jesus must identify with humans yet transcend them by His deity. (3) **Jesus' actions were always at one and same time divine-human actions.** "In perfect mutual love, divinity and humanity are distinct yet united in Christ" (Migliore, 151). (4) Christ was functionally subordinate to Father in the incarnation but only temporarily for his sojourn on earth (Phil 2.6-7). (5) We see what both divinity and humanity are really like by looking at Jesus of Nazareth. (6) His person as divine and human is complex but clearly reveals his divine nature and sinless human nature as well. "The relationship of God to Jesus and of Jesus to God has its basis and fullest analogy in the eternal exchange of love in the life of the triune God" (Migliore, 151).

#### 4. Summary

We have glimpsed briefly at the outline of discussion about Jesus' identity in the first five centuries of Christian history. As these dedicated Christian leaders deliberated trying to get a true understanding of who Jesus is, they kept returning again and again to the Scriptures to test their doctrinal conclusions. This is what we must do as well. All of our

thinking about Christ's identity must always be tested by Holy Scripture. For it is in the Bible, that we find the reliable testimony of Jesus perfect humanity and deity in one person. The Anglican Michael Green says we must keep listening to the common voice of Scripture, namely that, "the Ultimate had become embodied, the Absolute had become contemporary" (cited by Shelley, 97-98).

A common feature of the struggles to understand Christ's identity is the insistent question of Christ as Lord and Saviour. If he is not fully God, he cannot save us. If he is not fully human, he cannot save us. If he is not God incarnate, we have no Saviour. Our Christian belief in Jesus as the Christ is far more than the brainchild of some hard-thinking theologians in the early centuries. If the Canadian Prime Minister entered this room, we would stand in respect. If Jesus entered, we would fall down before him in adoration and worship. He is no mere example or even a great one of how to be human in this world. He is not just a great teacher. Jesus is none other than God with us and the Lord who reigns from a throne. Our greatest fidelity to him as the incarnate Truth of God is to break forth in praise. The hymn writers, better than the theologians, catch the heart of who Jesus is and what that means:

*Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne;  
Hark! How the heavenly anthems drown all music but its own:  
Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee,  
And hail him as they matchless King thro' all eternity.*

*Crown Him the Lord of life, Who triumphed over the grave,  
And rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save;  
His glories now we sing who died and rose on high,  
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.*  
-Matthew Bridges, d. 1894

### **III. The Mission of Jesus the Christ**

#### **1. Introduction**

Why does it seem to be the case that many Christians tend to think of Jesus as some sort of "Spiritual Superman" in a human body rather than as the One who was and is truly human? In our discussions of early church affirmations during the first five centuries, we found that human perceptions tend to go in extremes. There is an understandable historical sequence. If Jesus is God (and He is, affirmed at Nicea, 325), then how can He be *fully* human (as asked and affirmed at Constantinople, 381), and He if is both God and Man without being two (as asked and affirmed at Ephesus, 431), then how can He be one person with two natures without one being superior to the other (as asked and affirmed at Chalcedon)? All these questions and affirmations are important because the underlying pivotal question is, IF He is not all of the above, then what hope do we have for salvation (2 Cor. 5:19)? Our challenge today is understanding how to use these basic theological concepts of WHO Jesus is and then communicating this same Jesus the Christ for our salvation to folk today who don't think in Greek or Hebrew categories.

The historical reality and presence of Jesus the Christ is key to our understanding WHO He is. We can struggle conceptually with the above philosophical (logical or illogical) models, but it is the witness of His life, death and resurrection-- what God has done and does and will do in and through Him that reveals Who He is, not what *we* figure out in terms of His Person/Identity. This is why the totality of God's redeeming Word to us is wrapped up "in this one solitary life" we call Jesus, and we call Him Jesus because we believe He is the only One who can save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21). His claim to show us the Father is confirmed by God raising Him from the dead. Thus, His Person is real, authentic, fully divine and human. We bow before such great mystery, majesty and personified love. We seek to obey Him in humble adoration for we find only in Him the words and Way of eternal life (John 6:68).

Now we study his atoning work or his mission and consider the specific and major ways the Bible images (pictures) the meaning of His atoning death on the cross. We also look at some of the major ways Christians in history have tried to understand the biblical teachings and communicate that understanding to their given culture. Our major question: *how does the death of a Galilean peasant 2000 years ago have any possible connection to my life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Generally, the first 1000 years focused on the Person of Christ; with the Reformation and since, his atoning work has been emphasized. The early centuries sought above all to honour and protect God's saving work in and through Jesus Christ. They knew the incarnation meant precisely "Emmanuel", God with us. The church fathers echo the affirmation of the N.T.: Jesus IS Lord and Saviour. THAT Christ saves us is agreed upon by Christians, but exactly HOW he saves us is not: Are we saved by his life? If we are saved by his death, how so? Just how do Christian believers benefit from his saving (atoning) work; atonement means "at-one-ment" with God. The key theological term is: **reconciliation**; God reconciles sinners unto himself through the cross (2 Cor. 5:21).

Some general questions which are important: (1) Why did Jesus die on the cross? (2) How can His death "atone" for another? (3) How are God's love, justice and mercy related in terms of the cross? (4) What biblical and contemporary imagery best communicates the meaning of the cross today?

## **2. The Christian Consensus on Christ's Atonement**

Interestingly, there is no orthodox "creed" as to the accepted meaning of Christ's atoning work (the "how" atonement "works"), though all the major Christian creeds specify that Jesus Christ is both Lord and only Saviour. There was wide diversity in the thinking of the church fathers about the meaning of the cross. Some emphasized the cross as God's means of salvation is provided through the union of Christ's divinity and humanity AND our union as believers *with* Christ; this is called "theosis" in the Orthodox Church. Irenaeus liked to use the idea of "recapitulation" – Christ came as the "second" Adam and by means of his incarnation was obedient "even unto death" in order to provide



salvation. For Athanasius, the union of the human and divine in Christ in the incarnation, cross and resurrection offered a sacrifice for sins and means of overcoming death. He was fond of saying that Christ became human that we might become divine. Augustine: included the idea of “vicarious” suffering on our behalf; Christ’s death was essential if salvation is to be available to all. Other church fathers stressed a more dynamic, triumphal sense of Christ liberating the captives by means of ransom victory over the devil. All of these ideas originated in the eastern (Greek) part of the Church (except for Augustine who was in the Latin West), which later became the Orthodox Church. You probably noticed there were no views which spoke of the death of Christ on the cross to forgive us of our sins. In the East, union with God through the incarnation and the cross was stressed. In the West, the cross as the atoning sacrifice for sins and for the forgiveness of sins was stressed.

### **(1) Major Biblical Images and Concepts Related to Christ's Atonement**

Many Christians are surprised to learn there are so many biblical images or pictures of the meaning of the cross in the New Testament. This suggests to us that one particular image is inadequate by itself to express the full meaning of the cross of Christ for our salvation. But it also shows that the meaning of the cross itself is cross-cultural. The variety of images include financial, legal, military, sacrificial ideas. In Christian history we find several concepts or theories based on these biblical images that are culturally related which helped Christians in different eras understand the meaning of the cross.

(1) One of the earliest was that of **Christ as the Victor over sin and the devil**, a military idea. Colossians 2:15, *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* This image was a favourite in the early centuries because it dramatically portrayed the victory of God in Christ through the cross and resurrection. Its strength is in the ways it shows how costly is our salvation, but it is somewhat weak in that it pictures Christ's humanity as the disguise to trick the Devil. Plus, we know the Devil is not yet finally defeated; we still must do battle against sin and evil through the power of Christ.

(2) One of the most predominant images in Christian history is that of **satisfaction**. It seeks to illustrate how Christ's death on the cross "satisfies" God through his vicarious suffering. "Vicarious" means that Christ suffered for us in our place, as our substitute (Isa. 53; Gal. 3:13; 1 Cor. 5:7; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:22). His death makes possible the forgiveness of our sins. But how? During the Middle Ages, the theologian **Anselm** popularized this view. As he reflected on the biblical images of the cross, he could see its meaning for his day. He lived in a time of feudalism, when most people were poor and obligated to feudal lords. If they displeased these human lords in any way, the people would have to satisfy or make recompense for their offense. But sinful humans are incapable of accomplishing this satisfaction before God, only God can do that. Since God became human in Christ, and Jesus was perfectly obedient to the Father, God's honour is thereby satisfied and sinners can thus be forgiven. This satisfaction idea of Anselm is strong in the ways it stresses Christ's essential humanity, the seriousness of

human sinfulness before God, and what it cost to bring us salvation. But it seems to suggest it is God who needs to be reconciled to humans, not humans who need to be reconciled to God. It also projects mercy and justice in opposition to one another.

(3) A view of the atonement that is often seen as "liberal" because it does not seem to stress sufficiently what God himself does through the cross is called the **moral influence** theory. **Abelard** was the theologian who favoured this idea. He pictured the cross as the great example of how far God's love will go to save us. When we look upon the cross, it should move *us* to repent of our sins. *Look at how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God* (1 John 3:1, HCSB). This theory is strong on God's unconditional love and requiring human response but weak in that it really fails in the end to show what Christ's death on the cross really means, that God objectively accomplishes atonement for us. Where is the victory of the cross? For example, if you and I walk along the Bow River, and I jump into the water and just before I drown, I cry out to you, "I'm doing this because I love you!" You would rightly question my sanity. But if you fall into the river and I drown trying to save you, you know I love you. The well-known hymn, "When I survey the Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts is based in this view of atonement. Again, it's helpful in stressing the love of God but fails *by itself* to show what His love does to save us.

(4) During the Protestant Reformation, **John Calvin** reworked the satisfaction idea of Anselm, insisting it was not God's honour that required satisfaction but his wrath against sin. Calvin lived in a day when much attention was given to legal and justice issues as well as international law, plus Calvin himself had had legal training. He developed what has become the most preferred image of the meaning of the cross for evangelicals today; it is popularly known as the **penal substitutional view** of the atonement. Its greatest strength is insisting that it is God in Christ who does something to make atonement (2 Cor. 5:21). By giving himself as the sacrifice for our sins, Christ willingly propitiates or satisfies God's wrath toward our disobedience. This view is easily misunderstood. John Stott reminds us that "We must never make Christ the object of God's punishment or God the object of Christ's persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners" (*The Cross of Christ*, 151). The idea that the cross is "divine child abuse" of the Son of God by a bloodthirsty father who takes his revenge against sinners out on Christ, is worse than a caricature, it is theological rubbish of the worst degree. If there ever was a trinitarian Christian belief, it has to be most meaningfully portrayed in the cross. Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer captures this self-substitutional theory beautifully, "Amazing love! How can it be, that thou, my God, should'st die for me?"

Often we hear the sermon illustration of Jesus' cry of dereliction (his God-forsakenness) on the cross indicates God had turned his back on Jesus because God could not look upon sin. If we ever succumb to tritheism, it is with illustrations such as this. This illustration while dear to many evangelicals is an oversimplification of the cross as a trinitarian event. Keep in mind, God is in Christ, satisfying his own justice requirement for the sins of humanity. It is Christ who dies, not the Father, but the Father is there in Christ assuming the debt, penalty and depth of our sin.

### (3) The Importance of Worldview and Culture in Presenting the Gospel

All these interpretations of the meaning of the cross which were used in Christian history are biblically based. These ideas of the meaning of the cross are also culturally significant; they seek to re-present the meaning of the cross in understandable ways to their generation. All are in agreement that *only* what God Himself has done objectively in Christ makes salvation possible. But in order for the cross dimension of the gospel to be understood, it needs to address a person's world view in regard to his or her given understanding of sin. For certain the Christian gospel speaks to all cultures but the "hearing" of that message is filtered through a person's worldview perspectives. For example, a person in areas where Muslims predominate see "sin" as mistakes of ignorance and stress why it is important to understand and obey the laws of God. But they will respond to the gospel when they understand how it applies to honour and shame. Other people groups such as natives of Asia and North American aboriginals hear the gospel in regard to awareness of fear and power. While still others, particularly in the West, understand and hear the gospel in terms of sin, guilt and forgiveness.

It is the same eternal gospel that meets every person's need of salvation. All three of these basic worldview understandings of sin—shame, fear and guilt are all rooted in Genesis chapter 3. You may recall that Adam and Eve hid their nakedness because they were ashamed, they hid from God because they were afraid, and God made clear that because of their guilt resulting from their sin against God, they now would know enmity, hardship and die. Often when we present the gospel to internationals, and they do not accept it, it may be the case they are not hearing it in terms of their spiritual need. All of the biblical images relating to the cross which we have considered cover every aspect of the meaning of the cross.

How are we to understand the central declaration of our faith-- that Jesus died for us? Was it unavoidably essential Christ die for reconciliation to occur? Why does God not take the simpler route and "just forgive"? What is the significance of our Lord's death? How does Jesus' sacrifice affect us? How does it relate to forgiveness? In other words how do we today understand, accept and proclaim the cross of Jesus Christ?

When Peter preached the gospel to a large crowd on the day of Pentecost, he told them that the Christ had been confirmed by God himself by means of many miraculous signs. Next, he said God permitted Jesus to be handed over to the authorities to be crucified, and that this was actually God's plan. Then he said God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). What Peter said that day was the good news of the cross and resurrection. At the heart of the gospel of the cross and resurrection of our Lord is a concept of a holy God who wills to make atonement for human sin because this is something we cannot do for ourselves. This he did in the giving of his Son on the cross. Our sin totally deserves his wrath and condemnation. Jesus came as Messiah knowing full well that Messiahship meant his death upon a cross. Through the cross, Jesus "who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God". It was

our sin and God's holiness that made the cross necessary. Jesus paid that debt for us as only He could in order to bridge the separation sin caused between us and God.

For God simply to dismiss our sin apart from atonement denies Christian belief in God as holy and righteous. Christ's death on the cross provides reconciliation between us and God. However, the cross would have no significance whatever without the historical resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15)..

### **3. The Cross in the Light of the Resurrection**

It was the apostle Paul who first preached what I like to call the "irreducible gospel" -- that which we must believe and live by if we call ourselves Christ's followers. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, *Now brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....* Then in the next several verses, Paul lists some of those Christian believers who experienced appearances of the resurrected Lord. In this entire chapter, Paul focuses on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Without it, the cross is totally meaningless and powerless to save us. Without his resurrection there would be no New Testament, no N.T. church, no Christian life, no hope beyond the grave. There is no Christian gospel without cross and resurrection together as the saving event of Almighty God.

Without the resurrection the false messianic expectations of Christ's enemies and even Jesus' own disciples would have been right. The event of his resurrection was what opened their eyes to Him Who is eternal Lord. God's salvation history was climactically revealed in Christ's resurrection and will be completed when God chooses to consummate history with Christ's return.

## **VI. Theological Summary**

We have seen how important it is to see Jesus' identity and mission as inseparably related, just as His cross and resurrection are. If He is not God and human in one historical person, he cannot save us from our sins. If God had not raised him from the dead, we would remain lost in our sins. We have looked at some of the graphic biblical images which are simple pictures of why he came and what he accomplished on the cross. These images speak of a Saviour who came to get us out of a hopeless debt, to release us from the captivity of Satan and sin, to bear our penalty before a just God, to cleanse our sin at the Mercy Seat of God's grace. None of them exhaust the message and meaning of the cross. The reality of atonement is far greater and more important than any theological attempt to explain it. We must always remember we are saved by God in Christ, not by a theory of how that takes place. We know too that the cross is far more than an object lesson to prompt us to consider his redeeming love – the cross is something God himself has objectively accomplished that only he could do--provide

atonement for our sins. Despite the “scandalous” uniqueness of the cross and its “repulsive bloodiness” for some, the preaching of the cross is as urgent today as it was in the first century because the cross of Jesus Christ is still the ONLY redemptive means God has provided.

Atonement is made real only in human lives affected by the work of the Holy Spirit who draws us to Christ, convicts us of our sin and enables us to trust in him for our salvation. To the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit, we turn next.

## Part II: The Christian Belief in the Holy Spirit

Now we turn to the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit. The Greek Orthodox Church has always had a dominant attraction to the Holy Spirit, but this has not been the case for the most part in western Christianity. Throughout Christian history there have been periodic movements bearing the mark of the Holy Spirit like the Montanists in the 2nd century, the Waldensians in the 12th and the radical reformers (Anabaptists) in the 16th. But most of these movements were preoccupied with "individualistic spirituality" as Gordon Fee calls it rather than the empowering reality of the Kingdom of God and the church of Jesus Christ. However, things have greatly changed in the past 100 years or so, though we still have a tendency to overstate the "individualistic" working of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal movement which got under way in the early part of the 20th century usually gets credit for the renewal of interest in the Holy Spirit for the contemporary era. You would not be far wrong in naming this past century as the "age of the Holy Spirit". If you're not already convinced on the urgency of holding a biblically-based belief in the Holy Spirit, I hope you will be by the end of this presentation.

### I. Introduction

Gordon Fee, who wrote a definitive study on the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul, has recently surmised

If the church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and to recapture Paul's perspective: the Spirit as the *experienced, empowering* return of God's own *personal presence* in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically *eschatological* people in the present world while we await the consummation. (Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*, xv)

I could not agree more, and we will look at the indispensable importance of the Holy Spirit for the Christian life and Christ's church. But not only do we need to recover what the Holy Spirit means in the writings of Paul but we need to appreciate the person/work of the Holy Spirit in both Old and New Testaments. We will see that not only is the Spirit the source of power in God's creation, but he is also the personal power source in the Kingdom of God as God moves it to his intended completion.

One of my favourite comic strips is called "Family Circus". In one of them a small child was shown intently listening to his pastor's message. All at once his little ears heard something he could not quite understand. He tugged at his mother's arm, and she leaned down as he whispered in her ear. "Momma, who is this Holy Spearmint that our pastor's talking about?" It has only been in the past few decades that Baptists have heard much about the Holy Spirit. For over a hundred years Pentecostal churches have given tremendous attention to the Holy Spirit and have grown to be the largest non-Catholic Christian denomination throughout the world. They are easily the fastest growing Protestant denomination in Canada. While Pentecosts may have some views about the

Holy Spirit that make many Baptists uncomfortable, what is commendable is their utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

The 20th century saw three successive movements related to the Holy Spirit. The **first** was the origin and explosive growth of the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the century and still continuing at present; the **second** was the impact of the charismatic movement on non-Pentecostal churches near mid-century in which many mainline churches focused on the Holy Spirit, particularly in regard to spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues; the **third** was called the "signs and wonders" movement in the 1980s greatly influenced by the leadership of John Wimber and Peter Wagner and was highlighted by miraculous working of the Holy Spirit in physical healings and other extraordinary signs of the Spirit. Baptists at large at first looked askance at these movements but gradually by the last quarter of the century became more open to learning about the Holy Spirit's work in equipping Christians with spiritual gifts for ministry and in growing vital and healthy churches. Conferences and seminars have focused a lot of attention on spiritual gifts and church growth empowered by the Spirit, but there's still a great deal of confusion about the personality and larger mission of the Holy Spirit. I think Baptists have been traditionally reluctant to pay much attention to the Holy Spirit because many Baptists feel that groups like Pentecostals say too much. Personally, I'm not convinced we can overstate the importance of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the greatest confusion today is *who* the Holy Spirit is, what is his identity? Is He God or a being less than God? Is he equal in deity with Jesus? How are He and Christ related? Is the Holy Spirit fully personal or is it more proper to speak of him as an impersonal force and power? What is the Spirit's mission? How can Christians and churches know when the Holy Spirit is genuinely present and working? How can we discern when it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us or if it is some other spirit? These questions and others like them beg for answers. We will first consider the identity of the Spirit, then we will focus on his mission or his work. As we saw in our study of the Christian belief in Jesus Christ, there is some risk in arbitrarily separating the person/work of the Spirit. We separate them **ONLY** for the purpose of study and reflection. We best understand the Spirit by what he does, but it is also important to recognize who the Spirit is, because He is what He does. Keep this truth in mind as we first talk about the Spirit's identity.

## II. Identity of the Holy Spirit

For centuries, Christians in liturgical-styled churches have repeated the creedal affirmation, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." This theological expression is rooted in God's self-revelation. To understand how Christians in early Christianity came to this great truth, we need to trace God's progressive revelation of the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments. In the O.T. the Holy Spirit is known as the "Spirit of God". He moves on the face of the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2) and endows individuals and groups with special abilities. In the N.T., He is inseparably and significantly related to Jesus and his ministry. At Pentecost, He is distinctively revealed as the third Person of the Trinity. The book of Acts clearly identifies the Holy Spirit as the "power engine" if you please of

the movement of the Kingdom of God in history which produces the Christian Church and brings God's salvation history to completion in the triumphant return of Christ.

Sometimes I hear Christians refer to the Holy Spirit as "it", which is an impersonal reference. I discourage using "it" to refer to the Spirit because it tends to suggest the Spirit is an impersonal force or power. As is often said, we do not relate to an "it" but only to persons. The Holy Spirit is relational because He is personal. He is personal because He is the Person of the Holy Spirit. The N.T. teaches us that the Holy Spirit has intelligence, loves, can be grieved and lied to, convicts, sends, enables, plus many other personal characteristics. Thus, there is no doubt in the N.T. as to the distinguishable personality of the Holy Spirit as a trinitarian member of the Godhead. As we shall see in our study of the church, one of the most exciting acts the Holy Spirit does is to bind us together in a vibrant and dynamic fellowship with Himself and one another.

Millard Erickson has acknowledged some of the reasons we have difficulty in fully appreciating who the Holy Spirit is. (1) He says biblical descriptions of the person and work of the Spirit do not seem to be as explicit as those of the Father and the Son. (2) Plus, the imagery of God as Father and Jesus as the Son are quite familiar concepts to us but a non-embodied Spirit is more difficult to visualize. Added to this is the familiar translation of the KJV of the Spirit as a "ghost" which probably causes many to think of him as connected with a white sheet.

A very important aspect of the Spirit to remember is that the Holy Spirit *never* seeks to draw attention to Himself. I have a book in my library called *The Holy Spirit—Shy Member of the Trinity*. The authors' point is *not* that the Holy Spirit is backward and reluctant to assert his power—you'd never convince Ananias and Sapphira of that (Acts 5)! Rather, they insist that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is always to point to Christ not to himself (John 14:26; 16:14). But I think attributing "shyness" to the Holy Spirit can be misleading despite the authors' disclaimer. More apt would have been the title: "Bold member of the Trinity" because the Spirit's dynamic presence is clearly pronounced in Scripture even as He highlights who Jesus is and what He does.

### **1. Spirit of God in the Old Testament**

Because as Christians we believe in the Trinity, it is understandable that when we speak of the Spirit in the O.T., we think of the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the triune God. But I think it is important to respect the Old Testament for what it is, the book of promise. Not only does it promise a coming Saviour, God the Son, but there is also the promise of the coming of the *full* revelation of the Holy Spirit in many places. Two of the best known are in Ezek. 36:27 where God promised he would put "His Spirit within us", and Joel 2:28-29, where God promises he would pour His Spirit "on all humanity". All of this does not mean that the full personhood of the Holy Spirit did not exist during the times of the Old Testament. God's Spirit is eternal as is God the Father, and Christ the Son. What is clearly revealed in the O.T. is the Spirit is expressed as God's power bringing about creation and sustaining life on earth. All living creatures, humans and animals, are utterly dependent upon the life-giving and life-sustaining Spirit. When God



recalls His Spirit, life ceases (Eccl. 12:7, *the spirit returns to God who gave it.*) Also, God's Spirit endows individuals like Samson with extraordinary capabilities, others with artistic talents, still others a capacity to speak for God (Numbers 24:2-3, Balaam).

However, the O.T. does not present the Spirit as a Person or personality distinct from God. To be sure, there are some passages which seem to prepare the way for such an understanding. For example, Isa. 48:14 says *the Lord has sent His Spirit.* Isa 63:10 refers to how the sins of Israel have grieved the Spirit. Hag. 3:5 talks about *My Spirit is abiding in your midst.* Joel 2:28-29 promises that God's Spirit will be poured out upon people (an anticipation of Pentecost). These and other Scriptures do help prepare for a trinitarian understanding based on the full revelation of God's Spirit as the Holy Spirit at Pentecost because they give some indication of what is made clear in the N.T., there is distinction between God and His Spirit. It is important to recognize and appreciate the matter of "progressive revelation" in the Bible, especially the O.T. in relationship to the N.T. We should never drive a wedge between the O.T. and N.T. but rather we need to appreciate their unity in God's final revelation in Jesus Christ.

Are there any places in the O.T. where the Holy Spirit is so named? There are three references to God's Spirit as "holy" in the O.T. but they do not seem to specify personhood as much as the fact that **God is holy** and requires His people to be ethical and holy. See Ps. 51:11, Isa. 63:10-11. Some translations use "Holy" while others have the lower case, "holy"; I think the latter is most correct in keeping with the progressive revelation we have in the O.T. The passages in Genesis such as "let us make man in our image" are attributed to what is called "a plurality of majesty" or respect of God's name as *Elohim* rather than to the Trinity as such. In other words, the Person and permanent presence of the Holy Spirit will not be revealed until Pentecost, and until then there is what many O.T. scholars call "an eschatological longing" for the Spirit of God to come in full power and revelation upon God's people.

## 2. Jesus and the Spirit

In the N.T. we find a very close affinity between God's Spirit and Jesus. His miraculous conception occurs due to the "overshadowing presence and power" of the Spirit. Likewise, the Spirit comes upon him at his baptism and then immediately sends him into the desert for a time of intensive testing regarding his purpose and work as Messiah. Luke says Jesus returned from that time of testing *in the power of the Spirit* (4:14) and launched his earthly ministry at Nazareth, saying *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me* (v. 18). Jesus often drove out evil spirits by the Spirit's power, and Luke 10:17 even talks about how Jesus *rejoiced in the Spirit.* In John 14-16 Jesus taught his disciples about the coming of the H.S., how he would empower their mission for Christ, teach them and remind them of his instructions, guide them into all truth and above all, "testify" of and about the Christ (John 15:26). John 16:14, *He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.* In John 20, Jesus "breathes upon his disciples and tells them to receive His Spirit" an event which many seem to think is a foreshadowing of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. All in all, we can say that not only does Jesus "bear" the Spirit but He also imparts or gives the Spirit. While the Spirit and Christ are

to be distinguished as persons in the Trinity, you cannot get any closer affinity than that. I cannot find any reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in the N.T. which is apart from the Holy Spirit's relationship to Christ (see also 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

### **3. Significance of Pentecost**

At Pentecost, the Spirit of God came in a unique way into the world. That which the O.T. promises (Joel 2:28-29) and even angels says Peter were looking forward to (1 Pet. 1:10-12), came to pass. The moment in history prophesied in the O.T. had arrived. At Pentecost the God's Spirit was revealed as the Person of the Holy Spirit. He comes not as a reality in addition to Christ, but as the One to empower the realization of God's total Kingdom purposes through the crucified but risen triumphant Christ as Lord. At Pentecost Christ's church, which was rooted in God's faithful people of the covenant, was exemplified by the gathering of his disciples, came to full creation at Pentecost as 3,000 were evangelized in Jerusalem. Now the focus of the Holy Spirit will be the community of Christ, His church, which will be the sign and herald of God's kingdom. From henceforth, the Holy Spirit and Christ would be in an inseparable though distinguishable relationship.

### **4. The Holy Spirit in the Trinity**

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is identified as God and has full eternal deity just as do the Father and the Son. The personal nature of the Spirit, implied in the O.T., was fully revealed at Pentecost. The full divinity of the H.S. is made clear by Jesus when he speaks of the Spirit as being another Paraclete of the SAME kind as himself (John 14:16) and by the capacity of the Spirit to make known all that belongs to the Father through the Son (John 16:15). Paul says that only God can speak the things of God and that this is done by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-11) and also says that the Spirit is the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9). Thus, we can say based upon God's self-revelation in Scripture and human history that the H.S. is the person in the Trinity who creates, sustains creation, provides and applies God's redemption, births the church, produces the Holy Scriptures, empowers individuals and above all, brings about God's Kingdom purposes in the world.

**Summary:** He is Person and personal, not some vague indefinable force or power in the world. He participates in the same divine reality and has the same honour and respect as God the Father and God the Son. He is involved in the unity within the Triune God and is distinguished by the specific functions of bringing about creation, sustaining it, bringing redemption, indwelling the church and individuals, creating and empowering the church of Jesus Christ, and bringing all of God's purposes to eschatological completion. I heartily applaud Gordon Fee when he observes that the Holy Spirit is prominent in the creeds of Christianity, yet the Spirit "has been practically excluded from the experience life" of the Christian Church (*Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 46).

## **III. Mission of the Holy Spirit**

As we come to speak more specifically about the ministry and mission of the Holy Spirit, we need to remember how important it is to keep the person/work of the Spirit in mind. He does what and who he is. He is God the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ accomplishing all of God's purposes on this earth and in the universe. We will consider how the Holy Spirit relates to the larger perspective of God's salvation, to the church, in the Christian life and the production of Holy Scripture.

### 1. The Spirit's Work in Salvation

Salvation is inclusive of God's entire redeeming work in history and involves the Holy Spirit's relationship to Christ, our personal salvation, the origin and work of the church and God's entire plan of consummation of history and creation. For many years in his teaching career at SWBTS in Texas, Boyd Hunt, pointed out in his theology classes that all too often we limit the work of the Holy Spirit to our individualized salvation. He insisted that the Holy Spirit is also involved in God's entire Kingdom purposes and that we need to see individual salvation in the broader context of God's kingdom purposes. Thus, while some see the biblical belief of election as a matter of the election by God's grace of individuals, the larger biblical revelation said Hunt sees election in a corporate, kingdom sense. In other words, election should be studied in a missionary context because it involves God's purpose of saving peoples, not just individual persons. Hunt also said that our personal salvation needs to be kept in a balanced tension between what God does for us and what He requires (and enables) of us. Stanley Grenz was another theology professor who insisted that God's salvation involves the totality of God's future purposes of humanity and creation and that seeing election as a matter of saving individuals is too narrow to fit the focus of Scripture. He believed that the deep meaning of election will only be understood in the future at the return of Christ. We turn next to the Spirit's work in the individual Christian's life.

### 2. The Spirit's Work in the Christian Life

I think the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual Christian life can best be described by understanding what God does to save us and what he requires and graciously enables us to do within that personal salvation. Overall, it is very important to understand that the Bible teaches that the Christian life involves a lifelong process of engagement with the Holy Spirit. The Christian life begins with what is usually referred to as "conversion" which occurs when the Holy Spirit calls us to God's salvation, convicts us of our sins, helps us understand that we are lost and need to be saved, and then enables us to repent and turn to Christ. It is what Stanley Grenz calls "that **life-changing encounter** with the triune God which inaugurates a radical break with our old, fallen existence and a new life in fellowship with God, other believers and eventually with all creation." Traditionally, we think of *conversion* as the beginning point of the Christian life whereas *sanctification* is the ongoing process of conversion that is to continue throughout the life of the person who is being saved. I think it may be more biblically accurate to state that conversion begins and continues by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian disciple.

**Repentance and faith** are indispensably and inseparably related in the process of conversion which, again, I think continues until Jesus comes or we go to be with the Lord. *Repentance* is continually “turning away” from personal sin and seeking God’s forgiveness while *faith* is “turning toward” Christ in trust and personal commitment. Repentance and faith are to be seen as radical, definitive acts graciously enabled by the Holy Spirit. Repentance is a God-enabled abandonment and repudiation of personal sin. Faith is accepting and living out the promises of new life under the Lordship of Christ. Repentance is taught in Luke-Acts as the essential condition of and leading to forgiveness. Neither are possible without the working of the Holy Spirit in an individual’s life. Conversion is designed to bring about a life of consistent following of Christ, called “discipleship”.

The church as God’s community is invariably involved in our Christian lives, because for most if not all of us, church is where we hear the gospel, respond to it, are baptized, nurtured and are challenged to live out faithfully the Lordship claims of Christ. Again, conversion continues as what some call “sanctification” but I do not think conversion and sanctification should be separated. They are one work of the Holy Spirit. From beginning to the end of the Christian life is a progressive work of the Holy Spirit. Too often, we think only of “when I got saved” (past tense). Personal salvation in the N.T. is pictured as: “I was saved, I am being saved and I will be saved.” Three tenses are involved in the Christian’s life in Christ. The N.T. also affirms in several places we are saved by “hope” (Rom. 8:24) but that does not justify our saying, “I hope I’m saved”. One of the things the H.S. desires to do is assure us of our salvation (Rom. 8:16).

Those who speak of a “**baptism of the Holy Spirit**” as a subsequent empowerment for service *separate from* conversion miss the fact that the N.T. does *not* construe our reception of the Holy Spirit in this way. There is no such phrase in the N.T. Rather, there is the verbal action where we are baptized *IN* the Spirit at the moment of the beginning of our conversion (I Cor. 12:13). We cannot be saved apart from the Holy Spirit, said Paul (Rom. 8:9). The same Holy Spirit who draws us to Christ (Jo. 6:44) and enables our conversion is the same Spirit who desires to fill our lives with his power. Eph. 5:18 says we are to *be filled with the Spirit* and “be filled” is in the imperfect tense meaning we are to be continually filled with the Spirit throughout our lives. Boyd Hunt liked to put it this way: “**we are to become what we already are in Christ Jesus**”. The Holy Spirit makes Christlikeness expected AND possible. I think the simple reason we cannot find any verse of Scripture telling us we must be “baptized in the Spirit” is most likely because we have been from the point of the beginning of our conversion. I have utmost respect for those like Gordon Fee, though he is a Pentecostal, he insists that the idea of being “baptized in the Spirit” subsequent to conversion is not a biblical teaching.

The Holy Spirit, who is THE gift of the Spirit in the N.T., also sovereignly endows individual Christians within the local church with **specific spiritual gifts** for Christian ministry designed by God to build up the local church as the body of Christ. Only perhaps the gift of speaking in tongues is designed to edify and enrich the individual Christian life, all others, especially the gift of prophecy—the clear and persuasive speaking forth of God’s Word, are clearly given by the Spirit to build up the

body of Christ. There are several references to spiritual gifts in the N.T. as representative gifts of the Spirit within specific historical contexts which suggests these lists are not exhaustive. The Holy Spirit I believe continues to endow God's people with spiritual gifts required in a given historical and cultural context to enhance and build up Christ's work through his churches. All spiritual gifts are to be exercised through the medium of Christian love as Paul expresses it in 1 Cor. 13. 1 Cor. 12-14 is the longest passage in Scripture about spiritual gifts made necessary when the church in Corinth misunderstood and distorted God's purpose for spiritual gifts. They are not trophies or merit badges for individual status or recognition. If legitimate, they are signposts pointing to the Christ who indwells His church. W. T. Conner used to say, "It's not how high one can jump that indicates healthy spirituality, it's how straight one walks when he hits the ground." If someone is always talking about themselves instead of the Christ at work in them, it may be an indication that that individual has chosen his or her own spiritual gift, rather than it being given by the sovereign Holy Spirit. The purposes of all spiritual gifts is to point to Christ.

New Christians are sometimes puzzled by this idea of "spiritual gifts". Are they natural talents enhanced and utilized by the Holy Spirit for Christian ministry? Perhaps, but this is not necessarily so. Are they "special abilities" given at the moment of one's conversion? Should one be concerned to "discover" his or her spiritual gift? Besides 1 Cor. 12-14, other passages which "list" the gifts of the Spirit or at least refer to them are: Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11, and 1 Pet. 4:11. I think our questions can best be answered if we see "gifts" in the context of the Holy Spirit's ministry **in** the Christian Church. God wants us to be involved in His work, and the Holy Spirit is the One who enables us to accomplish God's purposes. The focus in the N.T. seems to be on the Spirit working through Christian disciples to do the ministries God wants done. I think the H.S. is most reliable in pointing out to each of us what God wants us to do in building up his church (See Kenneth Birding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts?* Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006).

I might also point out that most of those in the Reformed tradition today (including many Southern Baptists) believe that spiritual gifts were given only in the first century to get the Christian movement under way and they no longer are given by the Holy Spirit. Others contend the Holy Spirit continues to gift Christian disciples in Christian ministry. I agree with this latter view. But if we connect spiritual gifts to ministries God wants done through his church, it refocuses the issue away from individual abilities and concentrates on Spirit-endowed and empowered activity and should remove the contentiousness of the question.

What about **spiritual fruit**? This is a very important question to answer I think. More attention deserves to be given to the importance of bearing spiritual fruit *for* Christ. The H.S. enables Christians to bear spiritual fruit for the same reason he gives spiritual gifts and that is for us to bless others and be used of the Spirit to build up the body of Christ. Note how the qualities called "fruit" such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control flow out of a Christian's life and toward others. The Spirit does not endow spiritual gifts nor enables Christians to bear

spiritual fruit in order to draw attention to the individual Christian. Both are designed of the Spirit to honour Christ, build up the church and advance God's Kingdom. Craig Keener makes a timely point when he notes the main reference to "fruit of the Spirit" is in Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:16-25). They apparently were attempting to achieve their own salvation and failing to see it as God's free gift in Christ. Fruit of the Spirit relate to a Christian's character and identifies us as belonging to Christ. The imagery of the fruit tree is apt. The tree does not enjoy its own fruit; its function is to offer it to others.

**Is it possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation?** Most Baptists are familiar with the terms "once saved, always saved" and "eternal security". Neither of these terms are found in Scripture. This does not mean we are forced to accept the reality of apostasy or the possibility of losing one's salvation. Rather, there is no clear biblical teaching about apostasy. At the same time we need to keep in mind some very strong warning passages like Hebrews 6:4-6 as well as many others that it is quite precarious to take our salvation for granted. What is clear is the importance of "abiding in Christ" (see John 15) which the Holy Spirit makes possible.

Many passages in John's gospel speak of the importance of continuing to walk with Christ and believing in Him; these references are in the present tense. This at least means that one's personal salvation is not to be seen as a "fire insurance" policy as if one may just simply believe in Jesus and that faithfulness to Him really does not matter. God preserves us because He is the one who saves us; but He requires that we persevere within His preservation of us. Our union with Christ requires our faithfulness which God makes possible but we must put these God-given abilities into practice. Paul sums up the rhythm of God's saving us in Phil. 2: 12-13, *So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to will and act for His good purpose.*

This brings us to one final point I want to make about the Holy Spirit's working in the individual Christian life. Are Christians **supposed to strive** in their personal commitment to Christ or does this striving inject an element of personal works into the salvation process? In other words, what does Paul mean in **Phil. 2:12** that we are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling"? Does this not contradict being saved by grace? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a movement began that was called "the higher life" which focused on our not striving within our salvation, rather the goal was to relax in God's hands and let him do all the work. Sometimes the "higher life" was construed as "quietism" or letting God have total control. I think this whole idea is an example of failing to hold in balance the "both/andness" of the gospel of our salvation. Without the Holy Spirit's work in us, we can't be saved, nor can we minister and serve, but without our availability and responsiveness as enabled by the Spirit, we won't be saved nor can we be useful to God. Paul gives a perfect balance to this idea: we can only "work out" what God "puts in". I think God probably "puts in" only what we are willing to "work out" through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. This is another example of what happens when we "shortchange" Scripture by refusing the "both/andness" of God's

grace, our theology comes up too short. Phil. 2:12-13 textually go together and need to stay together.

### 3. The Spirit's Work in the Church

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three great Christian beliefs have experienced a revival of interest among Christians: the Trinity, the H.S. and the church. Since I devote an hour later to the important Christian belief in the church, I will only make a few observations about the Spirit's relationship to the church at this point. Discussions about the place of the church in God's purpose have taken on new life recently due to the ecumenical movement, church renewal movements and the postmodern interest in community. In this study of the belief about the Holy Spirit we have emphasized the Spirit's involvement in realizing God's creative and redemptive purposes in history. This is especially true of the Spirit's relationship to the church, which can be seen as the corporate dimension of Christian experience. Suffice it to say at this point that the hugely significant place of the church in God's Kingdom is possible ONLY because it is God's Spirit which gave it birth and continues to be the source of its power.

### 4. The Spirit and the Bible

Some attention was given to the indispensable importance of the Bible for Christianity during the introduction to our study of Christian beliefs. I deal with the Spirit's specific relationship to Holy Scripture now, especially in regard to the Holy Spirit's production of God's revelation in written form and the canonization of the Bible. Dealing with this topic as the last part of the work of the Holy Spirit is not meant to downplay its importance. Rather, it is featured last in terms of God's progressive revelation from the vantage point of the writing, usage and canonization of the books of the N.T. The N.T. writings would not be recognized as canonical until 397 A.D.

The OT was written down over a period of centuries and was based on the revelatory acts of God in the days of the old covenant. Often the Spirit of God told individuals like Jeremiah to write down the messages God wanted passed on to his people. Before the Word was written, it was spoken, and passed in oral tradition into its written form. Christians in the first century followed Jesus' pattern of accepting the 39 books we now have in our Bible. When the Jews recognized the canonicity of what became our O.T. in 90 AD, Christians readily accepted it as the written authority of the old covenant. This all means of course that the Bible of Jesus and Paul was the Hebrew Bible. Prior to Jesus' incarnation, the Jewish Bible had been translated into Greek, and this was one of the more significant preparations God made prior to Christ's birth. As Christian witnessed fanned out within the Roman Empire in the first century, they had a "Bible" in contemporary Greek spoken by most people they met.

Many Christians are surprised to learn that the N.T. was not finally canonized or **recognized** (this "recognition" cannot be overemphasized; some church bishops did not decide the canon of Scripture—God the Spirit did) as authoritative by the early church until late in the fourth century A.D.. The story of how it all happened is fascinating

drama. We believe the last of the original manuscripts of the books of the N.T. we now have was penned by the end of the first century, and it was likely the gospel of John. Most N.T. scholars believe 1 Thessalonians was the first N.T. book written. There were many, many Christian writings besides the books eventually recognized as Holy Scripture which were circulated, some of them helpful, many of them containing the actual words of Jesus. There were a number of writings called gospels, besides the four in our N.T. How did the early church come to recognize those which are authentically of the Holy Spirit? There were several criteria, the most important being that the books we have in the N.T. gave ample evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. These were the books and letters that were circulated, worn out, copied and re-copied and sometimes seized and destroyed by Roman authorities. Those written by an apostle or under apostolic influence were accepted; for example, the book of Hebrews was finally accepted because it was thought to have been written by Paul, though we now know it wasn't. We really do not know for certain the author of Hebrews but one thing is for certain, whoever wrote it certainly knew Jesus. Wide usage of certain books was another criteria. The process of canonization of Scripture came to a climatic *recognition* of the work of the Holy Spirit. He illumined the minds and hearts of the early Christians as to the integrity of the biblical materials just as he does our own today.

I like the story of the little girl who was reading her Bible. She put it down and began to pray: "God, thank you for your book, did you write any others?" No doubt she said far more than she understood. God, by means of the Holy Spirit, is the original author of our Bibles. It is appropriate to speak of the Bible as God's Word in written form. We must never substitute worship of the Bible for our worship of God, but without our Bibles what would we know of God, or how he provides salvation through Christ, or how he expects us to live by his power much less how he plans to consummate history? There is no way we can overemphasize the indispensable significance of Holy Scripture. If some seem to get carried away over views of inerrancy, perhaps they can be excused because this is the book that tells us how to be saved and how the saved are to live. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope* (Rom. 15:4, NIV).

It may be helpful to distinguish some key words as we think about the Spirit's relationship to the Bible. "Revelation" is God's self-disclosure as he revealed his will through several means such dreams, visions and above all his revelatory acts in history. Some of his revelation was given in direct encounter with individuals, others were through intermediaries such as angels. "Inspiration" was the ability that the Spirit of God gave to individuals within a given time and culture to write down what God wanted recorded about his self-revelation. An important dimension of the Spirit's work was giving the ability to understand what God was revealing about himself and his will and why he wanted his written word passed on to others. We call this "illumination".

Of the many references in the Bible regarding the production of Scripture, two stand out above the others. 2 Peter 1:20-21 refers to those who received God's revelation, *First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own*



*interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.* These verses stress the divine source of what became Holy Scripture. This text focuses on the inspiration of the **writers** God chose to record and transmit His written revelation. 2 Tim. 3:14-17 is the other passage. Writing to Timothy, Paul said, *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing those from whom you learned, and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* These verses clarify the **nature of the writings** themselves and that God produced them as a means of understanding his salvation. The complete context is important to fully appreciate the purpose of Holy Scripture, it is in deed, God's saving gospel. Both Paul and Peter are specifically referring to the books of the O.T. but by implication to the books of the N.T. as well.

We do not know precisely *how* the process of inspiration itself worked. But more importantly, we can be assured of the **result** of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the sacred writings. Through the orchestration of the Holy Spirit in inspiring and illuminating the writing down of Scripture **what God wanted written** has been recorded, and it is a **thoroughly trustworthy** resource. It is the Word of God in every sense of the term. The term "inerrant" is often used to describe the Bible as literally God's Word written in perfect form. Many who use "inerrancy" refer to the original manuscripts which no longer exist (at least not yet found), not to the copies we have today. Others prefer the term "infallible" to affirm the trustworthiness of its message. But I think the most telling indication of our respect for Holy Scripture is not a negative adjective of choice but whether we take it to heart and live by it—that's an undeniable affirmation of our submission to the divine authority of Holy Scripture.

Christians through the centuries are unanimous in affirming the sufficiency and the supremacy of Holy Scripture for determining the content of Christian beliefs. The Bible can be appreciated as a **divine-human book**, given by God *through* humans in order to convey understandably what God wants us to know. It both **contains and is God's Word to us in written form**. Without the Holy Spirit and God-chosen writers, it would not have been written and without the Holy Spirit's illumination today, we would not understand it. Through it we can hear the Master's voice. Some of you may recall the old RCA Victrola 78 RPM record players, or maybe you've seen one in an antique shop. Their logo was that of a dog cocking an ear and listening into a large lily-shaped megaphone ("this is my Master's voice" is printed at the bottom). So it is with our Bibles, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us hear God's very voice in Scripture. A hymn in an older Baptist hymnal put it well, *Beyond the sacred page, I seek thee Lord.*

#### **IV. Theological Summary**

Let's recap what we've learned about the Holy Spirit. Understanding and appreciating the belief of and in the Holy Spirit is based on the progressive self-revelation of the triune God.

1. The Holy Spirit is God. He participates in the same divine reality as God the Father and God the Son. He is as much eternal deity as Father and Son; though at times he may appear to be less pronounced in his person through his mission of effecting the work of the triune God, he isn't. He is the Spirit of God in full revelatory presence and power as evidenced at Pentecost.

2. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to initiate and complete God's plan for creation and redemption in its comprehensive kingdom scope.

- (1) He applies redemption to all who believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- (2) He makes possible the Christian life and the reality of the church as the signs and agents of God's kingdom in history. He endows individual Christians with one or more spiritual gifts to edify and build up the church and enables Christians to bear spiritual fruit to the glory of Christ.
- (3) He is the power engine of the Kingdom of God.
- (4) He effects biblical inspiration and illumination and enabled the early church to recognize the canonical Scriptures.