

SERIES: This We Believe
 SERMON: **I Believe in the Holy Spirit**
 SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:16-26
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In Acts 19:2 Paul asked some believers in Ephesus, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” and they replied, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Thankfully, most believers today know there is a Holy Spirit, but many do not seem to know that He is available to them or that he can make a difference in their lives. If exposed to some of the more extreme elements of the charismatic movement, they may have concluded that the Holy Spirit is only for those who have reached a special status in their spiritual experience. Not so! The Holy Spirit indwells every true believer and is available on a daily basis to help us live lives that are pleasing to God, fulfilling to ourselves, and productive for the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is one of the three members of the Trinity, being God in every sense that the Father is or that Jesus is.

The proposed new Statement of Faith of the Free Church reads as follows in Article 6:

The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

The Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament period.

Some people have the mistaken notion that the Holy Spirit is just a New Testament character. Certainly, the Holy Spirit did inaugurate some new ministries on the Day of Pentecost (which we will examine shortly), but that does not mean He was non-existent or unavailable in the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit appears at the very beginning of the book of Genesis (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”) and He continues to be active throughout the Old Testament with the people of God.

However, the ministry of the Holy Spirit was quite different in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. He only came upon selected men and women of God, offering them great power and anointing for special tasks, but He did not reside with them permanently. In fact, Michael Green, who wrote the excellent book, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, sums it up well when he says, “On the whole, you had to be someone rather special in Old Testament days to have the Spirit of God . . . the Spirit of God was not for every Tom, Dick and Harry.”

Among the special people who received the Holy Spirit were prophets, judges, kings, and on one occasion the Israelites as a whole (Haggai 2:5). But one couldn't count on the Spirit remaining. In fact, David prayed in Psalm 51:11, pleading with God to forgive him for his dastardly sin with Bathsheba: “take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” It is my view that this prayer need not be prayed by God's people today, but it was a very appropriate prayer in the Old Testament.

However, with the Incarnation of Christ a major change also took place in the Spirit's ministry—He became much more visible and pervasive.

The Holy Spirit was active at every major point in the life of Christ.

In His Virgin Birth. The very conception of Christ is attributed to the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon, or overshadowed, the Virgin Mary. This is stated in both Matt. 1 and Luke 1. It is a mistake to view the Holy Spirit as the physical father of Jesus, for this is not a case of a god cohabiting with a human being, as in Greek mythology and official Mormon doctrine. Rather the Holy Spirit simply performed a miracle that enabled Mary to conceive without the agency of a human father. Furthermore, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception.

In His baptism (Mark 1:10,11). Mark 1:10 says that “as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

In His temptation (Luke 4:1,2). “At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.” This is instructive, because it shows that God was on the offensive, not the defensive, when Jesus encountered Satan. God apparently initiated the confrontation with the Evil One in order to demonstrate to us that it is possible to face temptation and overcome it.

In His ministry. In John 16:14 Jesus says to His disciples, “The Holy Spirit will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” The Spirit's constant ministry is to glorify Christ. He does not draw attention to Himself, but to Christ. I would say that if you find people who are constantly talking about the Holy Spirit, praying to Him, and exalting Him, you have found people who have misunderstood the Holy Spirit's primary goal.

The Holy Spirit is active in the plan of salvation.

Josh did such a fine job last Sunday explaining the doctrine of salvation. I am simply going to point out how extensively the Holy Spirit was involved from the beginning to the end in God's plan.

He convicts the unbelieving sinner. John 16:8-11 tells us that “when the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt.” No one can truly receive Christ unless he acknowledges his guilt, and no one will acknowledge his guilt unless the Spirit convicts him. We have a tendency to get very discouraged when we try to witness to a friend or relative over a long period of time and receive no positive response. Sometimes we blame our ignorance of theology or apologetics, but, friends, there is a factor that goes beyond our witnessing expertise, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. If He does not convict, or if that person resists His conviction, there will be no positive response no matter how brilliant we are.

He regenerates. Regeneration, or the new birth, is ultimately the Spirit's work. Listen to Titus 3, beginning in verse 3:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

He baptizes and indwells. I am treating these together, because it is my opinion that they are intimately related, baptism being the means by which the indwelling is inaugurated. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is one of the most misunderstood aspects of the plan of salvation. There are those, particularly in the Wesleyan, Pentecostal and charismatic camps, who believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an event subsequent to salvation when a person becomes completely yielded to the Holy Spirit.

The Wesleyans have generally believed that the evidence of the Spirit's baptism is complete sanctification, or what used to be called sinless perfection. The Pentecostals and charismatics have generally seen the ability to speak in tongues as the evidence of the baptism of the Spirit. But all of these groups have in common the view that the Christian life is a two-stage process: conversion is stage one and then there is a second stage where one really "arrives" spiritually speaking.

This view is not without some biblical evidence, for in Acts chapter 2, the initial baptism of the Holy Spirit was indeed an event that happened to those who were already believers, and it was accompanied both by an advanced stage of spiritual power and by speaking in tongues. Back in chapter one the resurrected Christ met with His disciples for the last time before His ascension and told them, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Sure enough, just fifty days later it happened. Acts 2:1 says,

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

However, I think it is crucial that we ask whether this initial experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was meant to be the normal experience of all believers, and I am convinced that it was not. I believe the initial gift of the Spirit was accompanied by tongues in Acts 2 because there needed to be some experiential evidence to show that the Spirit had begun a new ministry of indwelling all believers. Otherwise, how would anyone know it was happening? After all, people indwelt by the Holy Spirit don't glow in the dark.

I believe Acts 2 is a unique case introducing the Holy Spirit's new ministry of indwelling to Jewish Christians. The only other time anything quite like it happened was in Acts 8 when Samaritan Christians were also introduced for the first time to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Since then the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a fact for every believer. In 1 Cor. 6:19 Paul writes to

the Christians at Corinth, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” Please be aware that Paul makes no distinction here between mature and immature believers or between those who speak in tongues and those who don't, or between those who tithe and those who don't. He simply says to all the Corinthian believers that the Holy Spirit is in them.

I have listed two other passages (1 Cor. 3:16-17 and Ephesians 2:21-22) which indicate that the Holy Spirit indwells the local church and the universal church, as well, but for our purposes this morning we want to focus on the indwelling of the individual believer.

Now if every believer—mature or immature—is indwelt by the Spirit of God, then that indwelling must begin at conversion. I suggest to you that at the moment we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ. Spirit baptism is immediate; water baptism is subsequent. Spirit baptism is the inner reality; water baptism is the outward symbol.

However, nowhere in the New Testament, other than on the Day of Pentecost and the corresponding event in Samaria in Acts 8, are those who are already Christians baptized with the Spirit. Furthermore, Christians subsequent to Pentecost are never told to wait for or pray for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They don't need to, for they are already baptized by the Spirit.

But can we deny the fact that some people have an unusual experience of the Holy Spirit that gives them power and releases them in prayer and praise and personal relationships? No, of course not. I am just saying that when they call that the baptism of the Holy Spirit they are using the wrong term to describe it. It is not the baptism of the Spirit; it is the filling or empowering of the Spirit.

Michael Green pleads with Pentecostal and charismatic believers to abandon this unscriptural use of terminology:

Baptism means beginning; it is the initiatory Christian rite, and it speaks of the initiatory Christian experience. If believing Christians are told they must be baptized with the Spirit, it inevitably suggests that they lack him already, that they have not yet begun. But they have begun! They are in Christ, justified, adopted into God's family, recipients of his gracious Spirit. The unintended arrogance of the division of Christians into those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and those who have not would be lessened if charismatics rejected the unscriptural use of this term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" to describe a second experience of those who are already Christians. It is contrary to the usage of the New Testament, confusing in the extreme, and contributory to division among the one people of the Spirit.

He seals believers. The sealing of the Holy Spirit has to do with our security. Listen to Paul as he speaks to believers in Eph. 4:30: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” What was the purpose of a seal in biblical times? It was to guarantee delivery to the right person and to let that person know that the contents were not tampered with. When we receive Jesus the Holy Spirit puts His seal on our lives, guaranteeing delivery to the Father. We are not sealed just until we commit a mortal sin; we are not sealed just until we become apathetic; we are not sealed just until someone snatches us out of the Father's hand (which, by the way, Jesus said can never happen). We are sealed until the day of redemption.

Now the Holy Spirit's ministries are not limited to the plan of salvation. He has other important ministries in the lives of believers.

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He teaches. This is another area where the Spirit's ministry has often been distorted. Many people appeal to the teaching ministry of the Spirit to justify weird interpretations they have come up with. Frankly, many of the passages appealed to concerning the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (like John 14 and 16) are actually speaking of His teaching ministry to the human authors of the Bible rather than to believers today. And those that do speak to us do not tell us He teaches us content or reveals interpretations, but rather that he motivates us to study, welcome, and apply the Word objectively to our lives.¹

He guides. The guiding ministry of the Spirit differs from His teaching ministry in that it deals with the individual's life as opposed to normative truth for the whole Church. I believe the only place we find truth for the whole church is in Scripture, but the Holy Spirit does help individual believers find direction for school, marriage, career, ministry, etc. when we listen to Him. In the book of Acts one finds numerous examples of the Spirit guiding Christians (and their churches) as they seek direction for their lives.

He prays. The believer actually has two great Intercessors working in his behalf. First, we have the Lord Jesus Christ whose intercession we considered two Sundays ago, but we also have the Holy Spirit. Turn with me to Romans 8:26-28:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Now let me ask a few questions. First, when does the Holy Spirit pray? The answer is clear—when we are weak, when we come to the end of ourselves. So long as we are self-sufficient the Spirit will pretty much leave us alone. Second, why does the Spirit pray? Because we don't know what to pray for. And the reason we don't know what to pray for is that we can't predict the future to know whether our present judgment is really conducive to our long-term good.

Third, how does the Spirit pray? With groanings too deep for words. Some people have tried to interpret this as referring to tongues-speaking, but I think that's the farthest thing from Paul's mind. Here it is the Holy Spirit who is praying, not the believer. And His praying is non-verbal, whereas tongues-speaking is by definition verbal.

And fourth, what is the result of the Holy Spirit's praying? God understands, listens and answers. But why do I need the Spirit to get an answer? Doesn't the Bible promise that "if we ask anything according to God's will, He hears us." (1 John 5:14) The problem is that often I don't know what God's will *is* in any particular case. But then I don't *have* to know because the Holy Spirit knows. "He

who searches our hearts – that's the Father – knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit *always* intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

Here's what I think this passage is telling us: “The Holy Spirit intercepts my weak and uncertain prayers and re-prays them according to the will of the Father. The Father then answers my prayers as the Spirit has re-prayed them.” And that is why sincere prayers, offered in faith, are not always granted as they were prayed. God answers them all right, but He answers them as the Spirit prays them, not as we prayed them. And for that we should be thankful.

Teresa of Avila once prayed, “Do not punish me by granting that which I wish or ask.” I for one am as thankful for unanswered prayers in my life as for answered prayers, because it has become obvious over time that my initial request would often have been very detrimental to my own welfare, had it been granted. One further point. Is it any wonder that verse 28 comes next? “All things work together for good to them that love God.” How could it be any other way in view of the praying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He fills. Ephesians 5:18: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” I see two factors that distinguish the Spirit's ministry of filling from His ministry of baptizing and indwelling. First, the baptism and indwelling of the Spirit are never commanded because they are automatic; i.e. every one who receives Christ as Savior is immediately baptized by the Spirit and indwelt by Him. But filling is not automatic and is therefore commanded.

Second, the filling of the Spirit is a repeatable experience, whereas baptism and indwelling are not. The imperative, “be filled” in the original language is in a tense that should be translated, “keep on being filled.” The ideal for the believer is to be filled continually, but should he lose the filling of the Spirit, he can be filled again.

Two other factors should also be pointed out about this command to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is plural (“you'all be filled”) indicating that every true believer is included in this command. And it is passive. We are not commanded to do something so much as allow something to be done to us. And what would that be? The negative contrast Paul offers tells us. “Do not get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit.” When a man is drunk we say he is “under the influence.” That is also true of the person who is filled with the Spirit. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The one who gets drunk makes a decision to put himself under the influence. You can't get drunk if you don't decide to drink. So too the one who is filled with the Spirit must make a volitional decision to put himself under the influence of the Spirit. No one is filled with the Spirit by accident or osmosis or by just waiting for it to happen. It is in your power and mine to determine whether we are filled with the Spirit or not.

In summary, being filled with the Spirit means being controlled by the Spirit. Such a person is happy, joyful, friendly, useful. He is living the most thrilling, exciting life a man can ever know. Nothing else, and no one else, can produce all these things and produce them all at the same time.

He gives spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are capacities for divine service that the Holy Spirit

sovereignly distributes to believers. To become depressed because you don't have the gifts that someone else has or to take lessons on learning how to exercise someone else's gifts stands in direct violation of the Scriptural teaching that the Spirit gives gifts to whom He will (1 Cor. 12:11). There is a wide variety of gifts—some public and some private, some sensational and some ordinary—but all are needed in the Body of Christ.

Many people have discovered their spiritual gift by observing what abilities God has blessed in their lives. If you don't know what your spiritual gift is, there is a very practical test that will help you discover it and then develop it. We periodically offer that test here at the church, and if you would like more information about it, Dan Curnutt will be glad to talk to you about it.

It is possible to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Four specific sins against the Holy Spirit are mentioned in the New Testament. The first two are sins that unbelievers commit; the other two are sins that a believer can commit.

Resisting the Spirit is rejecting the truth and conviction the Holy Spirit brings to bear on a person's life. Stephen said in his great speech just before he was martyred,

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him!

Blaspheming the Spirit is the ultimate in resistance. It is attributing to Satan things that are clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. This sin is unpardonable, according to Matt. 12:31,32.

Grieving the Spirit, however, is a sin that Christians can commit. We are warned against it in a passage addressed to Christians—Eph. 4:30: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” If you examine the context closely it becomes abundantly clear that grieving the Holy Spirit is primarily a sin of the tongue. The verse immediately preceding the warning says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” The verse that comes immediately after says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

I encourage all of us to think twice before we spew our venom on others—we are not only badmouthing those who are created in the image of God; we are also grieving the Spirit of God.

Quenching the Spirit is another sin warned against in 1 Thes. 5:19: “Do not put out the Spirit's fire.” What does this mean? Again we get a good hint from the context. The immediately preceding verses say, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” That would lead me to believe that a person can quench the Spirit by being sour and negative, by failing to pray, by being unthankful. Furthermore, the verse immediately after says, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” Sometimes we evangelicals may quench the Spirit by

making fun of what we consider charismatic excesses. Balance, of course, is critical here. The very next phrase says, “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” We need discernment to know when the Spirit is at work.

It is also possible to live by the power of the Holy Spirit and to exhibit His fruit in our lives.

Turn with me to Gal. 5:16-26. Two things stand out in this text:

The conflict between good and evil that all of us experience has its solution in living by the Spirit.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

There is no one here who doesn't understand what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the internal conflict that results when we fail to do what in our hearts we really want to do. That can cause confusion, discouragement, even despair, but the situation is not hopeless. Living by the Spirit is the answer. I believe Paul's command here, to “live by the Spirit,” is nearly synonymous with his command in Ephesians 5 to be “filled with the Spirit.” It means allowing Him to control us and being obedient to His leading.

The development of spiritual fruit is the result of keeping in step with the Spirit. In the next few verse Paul offers two catalogues of actions, first vices, then virtues. The vices he calls acts of the sinful nature; the virtues he calls the fruit of the Spirit. Only those who belong to Christ Jesus are effectively able to avoid the vices and practice the virtues, but here is the key in verse 25: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Fall in line with Him. Deliberately and purposefully walk along the path He has specified for us, both in the word of God, and in His personal guidance in our lives.

I close by noting the last verse in Gal. 5: “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” The message that comes through to me here more strongly than any other is that the principal evidence of a spirit-controlled life is not the ability to say beautiful prayers, or preach great sermons, or spend hours a day in Bible study, or serve others tirelessly. Rather the principal evidence is in one's ability to get along with fellow-believers, with our families, and with those whose lives we touch on the outside. We can talk about the Holy Spirit, we can expound on the fruit of the Spirit, we can exercise the gifts of the Spirit, including healing and tongues, but if we are having frequent conflict with our brothers and sisters in Christ, then there's something wrong with us. The Holy Spirit is not in control of our lives.

Friends, He wants to be, and He is willing to be. Of course, first we must become a child of God through faith in Christ.

i. I do want us to look for just a moment at one particularly difficult passage—1 John 2:26-27: “I am

writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him (i.e. from the Holy Spirit) remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you.” On the surface this text may be viewed as a rejection of human teachers in favor of direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, but I think that would be a serious misreading. In the first place, the Apostle John was teaching when he wrote this. Second, please note that he is trying to resolve a particular problem—false teachers leading people astray in the church. Third, his solution to the problem is to appeal to the presence of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the believer's life, helping us to distinguish between what is false and what is genuine. I believe it is a ministry of discernment more than interpretation.