

the ESSENTIALS



WHAT ALL CHRISTIANS BELIEVE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Part 8: I believe in the Holy Spirit | Pastor Joe Wittwer | March 8, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Today we're on the eighth article of the Apostle's Creed: **I believe in the Holy Spirit.** We've already said, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty . . . and I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son." Now we're saying, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." For the first Christians, the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, was not just a point of doctrine, but a person they knew and loved.

1. I believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Spirit completes the idea of the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Three-in-One. Jesus makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God, and yet different from the Father or Himself: *"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you"* (John 14:26). *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptize in the name of—the authority of—the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The writings of the apostles reflect this conception of God in many places. Consider Paul's writings: *"Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ"* (Romans 8:8-9). *"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'"* (Galatians 4:6). So from the very beginning, the Christian faith was Trinitarian: one God in three persons.

All our explanations and analogies of the Trinity—such as water, an egg, or a plant—fall short. But you don't have to fully understand the Trinity in order to enjoy the relationship, just as you don't have to understand how the sun functions in order to get a tan! This great mystery of Three-in-One is why the Trinity is such an awe-inspiring and unique aspect of the Christian faith.

2. God within us.

Jesus says the Holy Spirit lives inside every Christian, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you"* (John 14:16-17). When you choose to become a Christian, the Spirit takes up residence in your heart. He will never leave you or fail you. Jesus Himself could only be with so many people at a time; the Holy Spirit is within us all at all times.

This is why Jesus said, *"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you"* (John 16:7). Because of the Spirit, Paul can pray, *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"* (2 Corinthians 13:14). There are hundreds of verses on what the Holy Spirit does in our lives. But let's examine just four verbs in the song "Spirit of the Living God" to get a better idea:

a. **Melt me.** Our hardened hearts must be melted down before anything wondrous can take place. Then we can face our sin for what it is and work to overcome it. Paul says, *"When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment"* (John 16:8). He's repeating what John the Baptist had taught in **Matthew 3:11**, *"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* What's the fire? It's the fire of judgment and cleansing. Peter compares our faith to gold refined by fire: *"These [trials] have come so that your faith—of*

greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7), and Paul exhorts, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

b. **Mold me.** When we pray, “mold me,” we are inviting the Holy Spirit to shape us to be more like Jesus. This is God’s purpose for us: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to change, to live a new life. The result is called “the fruit of the Spirit”: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

c. **Fill me.** We must invite the Holy Spirit to fill up our hearts and our lives. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit is obvious in you—He spills over. God’s presence and power define you as a person.

d. **Use me.** 1 Corinthians 12 describes us as the body of Christ; each one of us is a member of the body, uniquely gifted to do our part. Spiritual gifts are God’s power given to us to do His work. “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21-22). And Jesus tells the disciples just before he ascends in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” As Jesus was sent by the Father, He now sends each of us as His missionaries. The Holy Spirit is not a point of doctrine for us; He’s a person we know and love. He lives in us, He melts us, He molds us, He fills us, and He uses us.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. While the term “the Trinity” isn’t used in the Bible, the concept comes from Jesus. Reread **Matthew 28:18-20** and **John 14:15-17** above. How does Jesus characterize the Holy Spirit?
2. **Melt:** Reread **John 16:8** and **Matthew 3:11**. What do they say about a key role the Holy Spirit has in our lives? Where are you “feeling the heat,” or where do you need to ask God to “melt” you? Recalling Joe’s talk two Sundays ago, how is God’s judgment “good news”?
3. **Mold:** Look up and read **Galatians 5:16-25** together and keep the passage open. Now reread **2 Corinthians 3:18**. Briefly do an *internal* “fruit inspection” in your life. Discuss one of these fruits you’re pleased to see God has been developing in your life right under your nose! Then discuss one where you need to intentionally ask Him to transform you.
4. **Fill:** Look up and read **Ephesians 3:16-19** together. How does the following statement relate to this Scripture: “We minister out of our excess”? What spiritual disciplines or practices tend to fill you up to overflowing?
5. **Use:** C.S. Lewis said regarding filled Christians, “When one meets the real thing...it is irresistible. If even 10% of the world’s population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year’s end?” Where are you seeing the Holy Spirit using Christians you know or in the world at large? How are you inviting the Spirit to fall afresh on you and make a difference in this world through your life?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Continue memorizing the Apostle’s Creed by writing it, saying it, and/or meditating upon it.
- For the Spirit to *melt*, *mold* and *fill* you so He can *use* you, this is a great time to refresh, renew or begin a habit of daily PBJ!

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for His grace in sending us Himself in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Worship Him.
- Ask God to melt and mold you, to work through the Holy Spirit in each of your lives so you can become more like Jesus. Pray for specific opportunities to be filled and used this week.
- Bring any other praises and requests before the Lord that arose during your discussion.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

For further reading on Christian doctrine:

- *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe it, and Why it Matters*, Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, Zondervan, 2008.
- *Christian Basics: An Invitation to Discipleship*, John Stott, Baker, 1991.
- *Basic Christianity*, John Stott, InterVarsity Press.
- *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, N. T. Wright, Harper, 2006.
- *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis, Macmillan, 1952.
- *Christian Theology in Plain Language*, Bruce Shelley, Word, 1985

For further reading on the Apostles' Creed:

- *The Apostles' Creed*, William Barclay, Knox, 1998.
- *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles Creed*, Alister McGrath, InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- *Affirming the Apostles' Creed*, J. I. Packer, Crossway, 2008.
- *Credo: Believing in Something to Die For*, Ray Pritchard, 2005.