



The Apostles' Creed

Study 5: The Holy Spirit, The Giver Of Life (John 14:8-21)

o The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life through faith in Christ, sustains our faith by the word of God, and empowers us to serve God.

I. Ancient and modern errors on the Holy Spirit.

1. Montanism (also called the New Prophecy) was a movement started by Montanus in Phrygia, Asia Minor, in the late 2nd century. Not much is known of the movement except what the defenders of the orthodox faith said about it. Together with two women prophetesses, Montanus claimed that the sign gifts from the time of the apostles had lingered on, bringing new revelations and ecstatic experiences.
 - Tertullian (AD 160-220) of Carthage, who defended the doctrine of the Trinity against Gnosticism, was to become a Montanist in his later years. He was of a fiery temperament and became disillusioned with what he perceived to be complacency in the church. In the subsequent decades after Tertullian's death the Montanists became extremely radical, if not outrightly heretical.
 - Under the reign of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, circa AD 161-180, there was sporadic executions of Christians which coincided with the spread of Montanism. Montanism was finally condemned at a synod in Hierapolis (in Turkey) around AD 177, and also by the bishop of Rome.
2. Sabellianism denied the Trinity and claimed that God consists of one person, who appears in different modes - as the Son after the resurrection, then as the Holy Spirit. The one God successively revealed Himself as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. Sabellius probably originated from Libya but was teaching in Rome around AD 215.
 - Sabellianism was opposed by Tertullian in North Africa and by Hippolytus in Rome. Tertullian gave Sabellius' doctrine the name Patripassianism, meaning 'the father suffered', since the Son is only a manifestation of the Father. Sabellius used the term 'homousios' to mean that the father and the Son were 'one essential person'. The term was used by Athanasius of Alexandria later to mean the Father and the Son are 'of the same substance', over against Arius who claimed that the Father and the Son are 'homoiousios' ('of similar substance').
3. While dealing with the Trinitarian controversies, the Nicene Creed was drawn up which stated that "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. Who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified." The Eastern church objected to the "filioque" phrase (Latin, meaning 'and the Son'), claiming that John 15:26 teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father.

- This difference became one of the causes of the Great Schism between East and West in AD 1054. The “filioque” phrase becomes the accepted teaching of Western and Protestant Christianity due mainly to the writings of Augustine of Hippo.
4. Old errors tend to reappear, often under different names.
- The origin of Pentecostalism has been traced to Edward Irving (1792-1834) who founded the Catholic Apostolic Church in Britain. It was claimed that the charismatic gifts had been revived, including the the extraordinary offices of apostles, prophets and evangelists. Prophecies, healing, tongues and ecstatic experiences were prominent.
 - As the Pentecostal movement developed and spread in America, its similarity to the Montanist movement has been noted. The largest of the Pentecostal denomination is the Assemblies of God. A small number of the movement diverted to hold to “Oneness theology” in which the Trinity is denied and replaced with modalism. In this, they are similar to Sabellianism.
 - The charismatic movement started in America in the 1960s and share much in common with the Pentecostal movement. Today, it is hard to differentiate between the two movements since the beliefs and practices are similar.

II. The teaching of the Apostles’ Creed.

1. The Nicene Creed expounds on the Apostles’ Creed by affirming three main truths. First, “we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.”
 - The Holy Spirit is “the Lord”, a title referring to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This shows that He is inseparable from, and represents the Son of God, on earth. See John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7. The doctrine of “the co-inherence of the divine persons” (John 17:22-23) makes it possible for the Trinity to be in believers and with believers (Matt. 28:18-20), by the Spirit.
 - The Holy Spirit is the giver of life. He is the principle of creation, while the Son of God may be considered the agent of creation (cf. Gen. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3; Psalm 104:30; Prov. 8:30).
 - The work of regeneration and sanctification is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, who applies the redemptive work of Christ, and the written word of Christ, to the elect (Rom. 10:17 cf. Matt. 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:22-23 cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).
 - The importance of reliance on the Holy Spirit in our service to God cannot be over-emphasised. We are to be filled with the Spirit to serve God effectively (Eph. 5:18; Col. 1:29).
2. The Nicene Creed says, “He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.”
 - The relationship between the three persons of the Godhead is to be noted. Just as the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son.
 - The Holy Spirit is a divine person, not a force, a power, or an influence. We refer to the Spirit as “Him”, not as “it”. Modalism must be avoided in explaining the Godhead, e.g. ice turning into water, water into steam.
 - It is not wrong to pray to the Holy Spirit, in exceptional circumstances, since He is divine. However, the relationship between the three persons is such that we should normally address our prayer to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Spirit (John 16:23-24).

3. The Nicene Creed further says, “He spoke through the prophets.”

- Spirit and word cannot be separated, just as Christ and Spirit cannot be separated, and Christ and the word cannot be separated. The written word is given by the Son of God, by the inspiration of the Spirit (John 16:12-15). The word is used by the Spirit to convince, convict, and convert (Rom 6:17; 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). The Spirit drives the believer back to the word for spiritual growth (Matt. 4:4; 2 Pet. 3:18).
- The Liberals dwell on the word without the Spirit. The charismatics dwell on the Spirit and undermine the word. The Liberals tends to rationalism, the charismatics to mysticism. The Pentecostals claim to hold to the inerrancy of Scripture, but that is not that is not the same as holding to the sole authority of Scripture which includes its sufficiency.
- We must not separate the Spirit and the word. It is suggested that the Apostles’ Creed be amended to “We believe in the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of the Holy Scripture.”

= As we serve the Lord, let us remember His words in Zech. 4:6, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.”

Review Questions

1. State the teaching of Montanus about spiritual gifts.
2. Which well-known church father joined Montanism?
3. What did Sabellianism teach about the Trinity?
4. What phrase in the Nicene Creed was objected to by the Eastern Church and what does it mean?
5. How is Pentecostalism similar to Montanism and how is it similar to Sabellianism?
6. What does the Nicene Creed teach about the person of the Holy Spirit?
7. What does the Nicene Creed teach about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son?
8. What does the Nicene Creed teach concerning the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the word of God?
9. How does the Holy Spirit use the word to save sinners?
10. How does a believe grow spiritually?

Assignment/Discussion

Charismatics often accuse other Christians of not believing in the Holy Spirit. What do they mean, and how would you answer them?

Memory Passage (John 14:15-18)

15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

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