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College Baptist Church

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The Holy Spirit: Persuasive, Powerful Pointer to Glory

Jn 16:4-15

Affirmation #5: The Holy Spirit

"We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and to regenerate, sanctify and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide."

The fifth affirmation in the Baptist General Conference Statement of beliefs brings us to the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. Some call him the "shy" member of the Trinity, because his role seems forever to be pointing away from himself to the glory of the Father and the glory of the Son. We'll see again and again this morning how much this shy role is central to the Spirit's importance in the Trinity.

He is, as theologians from Augustine to Jonathan Edwards to CS Lewis have all affirmed, maybe most helpfully understood as the personification of the love that the Father has for the Son and that the Son has for the Father. We sometimes talk about the spirit of a family or about school spirit in something like this sense. It's our love for the thing and our desire to participate together in this common commitment to each other and to a shared mission. It's our desire to see that shared mission get glory!

Now imagine that that love and that joy and that shared commitment and that desire to exalt what we share is, taken all together, so palpable, so real, that it takes form as a person itself. Something like that is a way to begin imagining the identity of the person of the Holy Spirit.

The very first thing the affirmation says is historically very significant but we're not going to dwell on it this morning. It says that Spirit "comes forth" from the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed also says that he "proceeds from the Father and the Son." It bears some mention that this phrase has been a significant battleground between the Western Church both Roman Catholic and Protestant on the one hand and Eastern Orthodoxy on the other. The original creeds of the church for the first six centuries used to read simply that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (period). The words "and from the Son" (one word in Latin: "*filioque*") began to be added by the western church in various quarters from the sixth century until it became official in Rome in the 11th century.

The Eastern Orthodox Church continues to insist that the original form of the creed states the truth of the Godhead the best. The reasons why this difference generates the passion it does, particularly in the Eastern Church, is a very interesting subject for another time. If you have friends in the Eastern Orthodox church (or if you sign up for a Religion class), ask about the *filioque*. You'll get a pretty large earful.

I'll only observe today from our text in John that Jesus the Son, does say he will send another Comforter. It's also the case, as we said last week, that Jesus came into the world by the conception of the Holy Spirit. So there's even a sense in which the Son proceeds from the Holy Spirit.

It would be odd, it seems to me, to talk about a school of one student having a "school spirit." And it would be similarly odd, it seems to me, to speak of the divine Spirit as proceeding from only one and not the other person of the Trinity, especially if he is the love that binds them together as One.

Again there is an equality of value and purpose among the three persons of the Trinity, and at the same time their roles with relation to each other do assume some interactions of submission and subordination and procession.

Look at v.13 in John. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak on his own initiative. He speaks whatever he hears from the Father and he takes of the Son's things and discloses that. There's that "shy" quality again.

The more important question our affirmation answers is to what purpose the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. What is his mission as a person? What primary role does he come forth to play?

The BGC answers that with three main roles that in the statement each have three parts:

First, he came to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Second, he came to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. Third, he came to be an abiding helper, teacher, and guide. I've summarized those same three purposes in the title of the sermon with the words **persuasion**, **power**, and **pointing**.

The Holy Spirit is the Trinity's persuasive, powerful, pointer to the glory of God.

All three of these roles emerge from this morning's text in Jn 16, so let's study them there in the context of Jesus teaching where they derive their authority. We'll pull in some parallel texts along the way, too, so keep your Bibles close to hand.

The first description of the Holy Spirit's role in the affirmation comes word for word from Jn 16:8. Jesus sends the Spirit to convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.

This word 'convict' doesn't mean just make the world feel guilty for sin and its lack of righteousness, and the judgment it deserves. That may be one symptom of the Holy Spirit's work. But the word here has to do more with apologetics and **persuasion**. The early apologists -- defenders -- of the church in the first few centuries sometimes used this Greek word, *Elenchus*, in the titles of their books that they wrote to defend solid doctrine and to refute heresy and to persuade unbelievers that Christianity shouldn't be rejected. It means "proof." Or, by extension, "reproof." These were books written to refute people who didn't like Christianity. That's an important clue to the role that Jesus is describing for the Holy Spirit here.

He persuades us about sin. Why? Because he wants us to feel guilty? That's part of it, but it's not his point in the context. People need to be convicted or persuaded about sin because we don't believe in Jesus. That's his argument. The reason we need to be persuaded about sin is because we've pushed Jesus away. We need persuasion to see that Jesus isn't somebody who should be avoided. If we were persuaded to see him for who he is, we would welcome him. We'd embrace him.

The same thing goes for righteousness and judgment. These are unpleasant topics for people who enjoy their sin. The last thing that people want who want to keep their vices is for someone to walk in and remind them there is righteousness to aspire to and judgment to pay. Sin and righteousness and judgment make a sinful world uncomfortable. As v.12 puts it, we can't bear to hear things like that in a sinful world.

So what's the work of the Holy Spirit? He can accomplish this persuasive conviction that turns a sinner around and brings him to see the truth that sin is only pleasurable for a moment, the truth that in the long run sin is a deadly poison. He can help a sinner to be glad for the message about righteousness because in eternity it's gold. He can persuade a sinner to turn from not believing in Jesus to eagerly welcoming him as the answer to the judgment we face for our sin.

This is exactly the same argument Paul makes in 1 Cor 2 about the work of the Holy Spirit. Look with me at 1 Cor 2:6-16.(v.7:) Paul has wisdom to impart from God that is a secret to the rulers of this age. Why was it a secret to them? Why didn't they understand it? Because whenever they heard it they pushed it away. They didn't like it. The good news came with the Lord of glory, and what did they do when they heard it? (v.8) They crucified it! V.14 says "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.

But the spiritual person judges all things. This is the same root as the word for judgment in John. And it's the same word that appears at the end of the previous verse (14) in 1 Cor 2. The things of the spirit are spiritually "discerned." The natural person rejects them. The person with the Spirit discerns, judges, understands them -- because the Holy Spirit came forth from the Father and the Son exactly for that end: to convict, to persuade the world of sin, and righteousness and judgment.

So when v.8 says the rulers crucified Jesus because they didn't understand the wisdom of God, and when v.14 says the natural person isn't able to understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned, does that mean that a person without the spirit is left without enough information? or is he left with insufficient mental capacity to make sense out of the gospel?

It can't be. If that's what it meant, then sharing the gospel with an unbeliever would be a waste of time. There would be about as much point in that as in my preaching to you this morning in Swahili. You wouldn't understand. More

than that, you wouldn't even have any responsibility to understand a sermon in Swahili. And no one would be responsible before God if that's what Paul meant when he said the world in its natural condition of sin doesn't understand the wisdom of God. But in Rom 1:20, Paul argues his convincing case that we are responsible and that we can understand. Every one of us on this planet.

So Paul and John aren't saying that the work of the Holy Spirit gives us a mental grasp of what God wants to say to us. The rulers of the world didn't crucify Jesus because they found him guilty of speaking unintelligible Martian or gibberish. They crucified him because they had only too good a mental grasp of what he was saying, and they hated what they were hearing. In a mental sense they understood loud and clear. In a moral or a value sense, what they heard made them so uncomfortable that they had to kill it.

The word Paul uses in 2:14 is significant. The natural person, he says, doesn't "accept" the things of the Spirit. The word he uses here doesn't mean accept in the sense of a mental grasp. The word means accept in the sense of welcome. The work of the Holy Spirit is to work persuasively (through the head, yes, but finally) in the heart to help us to see that what we understand is not bad news to reject but good news to love and embrace. Likewise the word judge or discern here doesn't mean just to comprehend something or to tell the difference between things. It has to do with the appraisal of a value judgment: Are these things of God something bad for me that I should reject? or something good for me that I should accept.

The bad news for students who are praying to God in the middle of a test is that God the Holy Spirit doesn't work to raise our mental IQ. He works to soften our hearts to be joyful when we hear the news that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Otherwise the word of the cross is foolishness. We hear the voice of the natural person around us all the time: What do you mean all my acts of good citizenship and clean living are still going to land me in hell? I'm a good person. I should go to heaven. I've earned it! And the word of the cross says that attitude of self-reliance and self-esteem is so repulsive that God himself has to die if we are ever to be rescued from its evil. That's foolishness to the natural person. But it's joyful delight to the sinner in whose heart the Spirit has done his softening, God-exalting work.

The first role of the Holy Spirit is to persuade us that God is glorious, and not repulsive, so that we'll stop foolishly pushing God out of our lives and instead joyfully welcome him into our lives. His persuasion points to the glory of God.

But this persuasive, convicting work of the Spirit brings us to a further question, and that's what this second part of the affirmation is all about.

If the Word of God (in written form and in human form) reveals to us "the things of God" and the natural person isn't able to grasp them because they are spiritually appraised, then how is the natural man ever going to come to a saving knowledge of the truth? Every time he hears it and understands it, he rejects it. What's a poor evangelist to do? The more the unbeliever understands, the more they push the gospel away. The harder the evangelist works, the more the sinner wants to crucify the God that the gospel puts forward.

And the Bible's answer, Christ's answer, God's answer is: pray. Pray for the Holy Spirit to do a work in the sinner's heart. Because until the Spirit softens the heart, the message is going to continue to get pushed away as foolishness.

The reason we pray for our unbelieving friends is that we believe the Holy Spirit has to work this miracle of acceptance in their heart before the message of our gospel is ever going to get a reception. We don't stop helping them to understand in the meantime. They can't welcome something their mind doesn't grasp. But the joy of the message, the taste for the message: that comes from the Holy Spirit. That IS the Holy Spirit, so real and so palpable a love for the things of God that it is itself a person. It is itself God.

Joy in God is the **empowering** motive of evangelism. Joy in God is the **power** that moves us to grow in discipleship and maturity. Joy in God is the **power** that day by day transforms us more and more into the image of Christ by making us holy. Joy in God IS the work of the Holy Spirit. A desire to glorify God is the work of the Holy Spirit. And that's empowering.

It's good news to the missionary, who goes to minister in the middle of a highly resistant people group, say, among the Muslims of Banda Aceh. No missionary has to go there thinking how am I ever going to turn around centuries of

captivity to animism and Islam and hatred of Western Christianity in this people? Missionaries don't have the power to do that kind of turning around. That's the work of the Holy Spirit, who is already going ahead of the missionary and creating the receptivity in the hearts of the people. Missionaries just go in to reap God's harvest. So missionaries go in with joy and confidence.

Before Paul ever walked in to the city of Corinth God told him in Ac 18:10, "I have people in this city." That is an empowering confidence for a missionary.

That's an empowering confidence for people in this congregation who have unbelieving neighbors and unbelieving friends in the dormitory. God has people in Simpson and Olds and the Pi Phi house and in Sigma Chi and in Galloway and McIntyre and wherever you live. It's not our job to make them receptive to the gospel. It's our job to pray for them that God's Holy Spirit will be at work in their hearts to kindle joy in the gospel we bring them instead of rejection; and it's our job to bring them that message and help them to understand it.

That's liberating. The Holy Spirit is the power of regeneration, striking the spark of joy and acceptance in human hearts. The Holy Spirit is the power of holiness, blowing with his breath over the embers of our little faith so that they blaze up into growth in sanctification. The power to glorify God comes from God himself. The power to glorify God IS the Holy Spirit, so real, so palpable, that it is itself a person of the Trinity.

Regeneration is the subject of next week's affirmation, so we'll have more to say about this new birth in the heart next Sunday. For now we only need to observe that the power for what we'll be talking about next week comes from God the Holy Spirit.

The first role of the Holy Spirit is to persuade us that God is glorious, and not repulsive. The second role of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to live and to grow in the joy and the glory of God. The third role that the affirmation names is the activity of the Holy Spirit in helping and teaching and guiding us, **pointing** us every step of the way to the truth and the glory of God.

Jn 16:13 -- When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. Whatever he hears about the truth and joy of God he will speak. And he'll declare to us the things that are to come. Without the Spirit we are powerless, weak, lost, and hopeless.

Paul underscores this in the 8th chapter of Romans where he talks at length again about the Spirit. In Rom 8:23 he says that even when we have the first-fruits of the Spirit we still groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as children of God, as we wait for the redemption of our bodies, as we live in hope but still in the painfulness of this world.

But then look at 8:26. The Spirit *helps* us in our weakness. Sometimes we don't even know what to pray. Lord, I'm in prison, Paul says in Philippians 1. If I am to go on living in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me. But if to live is Christ, to die is gain. So I am hard pressed between the two. What to choose is difficult. So what does he do? He prays. Spirit, help! Because the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

The Spirit helps us to live (8:2 says) by setting us free from the law of sin and death. If we walk according to the Spirit (8:4 says), he helps us to fulfill the just requirement of the law. To set the mind on the Spirit (8:6 says) helps us to have life and peace. The Spirit who dwells in us (8:11 says) gives life to our mortal bodies, just as it raised Jesus from the dead. The Spirit helps us (8:13 says) to put to death the deeds of the body. The Spirit leads and guides us (8:14 says) to be children of God. The Spirit (8:15 says) helps us not fall back into the fearful mode of our slavery to things of this world, but gives us (8:16 says) the assurance of our salvation and our inheritance with Christ in heaven.

This is why Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Helper, or the Counselor, or the Comforter, in Jn 16:7. This is the word Paraklete, the one who comes alongside us to plead our case before God the Judge of the world. He comes alongside us to pray for us, to free us from fear, to help us live out the law, to let us have peace and assurance in our heart.

It's not some impersonal thing or force that comes alongside us to do this. It is a person. When Jesus prays in Jn 14:16 he asks the Father to give his disciples "another Counselor" (helper, comforter, Paraklete): another person like Jesus, the Son. When he tells his disciples that he prayed for the Spirit to come, he says "I will come to you." The

world won't see me any more, but you will see me. The Spirit is a personal extension of the persons of the Father and the Son. He comes forth from them. And he helps and teaches and guides.

God doesn't save us to beat us up with rules about how to live. He saves us from the condemnation of hell, and then he comes alongside us for the rest of eternity to save us from the foolishness of sin and the fearfulness of having no hope and the joylessness of having no promises to trust or beauty to worship.

How does he do that? He keeps pointing us to the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Jn 16:14 -- Jesus says, "He will glorify me. He will take what is mine and declare it to you." He plants the joy of God in our hearts. Being filled with the Spirit means being filled with great joy in God. It means being caught up into the very joy that flows in the Trinity as the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. It means loving God with the very same love with which the Father and the Son love each other.

Being filled with the Spirit is being persuasively, powerfully pointed to the glory of God.

And so the Spirit is present at the Lord's table. The broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ point us persuasively and powerfully to the glory of God. And that is the work of the Spirit.