

Reformation
& Revival



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The conflict of the ages is a spiritual one. It is the battle between the pseudospiritual and the spiritual, between superstition and the supernatural, between magic which seeks to manipulate the powers, and faith that trusts and obeys, depends and expects, submits and hopes.

When the Christian confesses, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," he is aligning himself with the forces of the spiritual, the supernatural. He is engaging in the fight of faith. He is swearing eternal vigilance, indeed, eternal hostility against the pseudospiritual, against superstition, against the magical; against all forms of false spiritual or religious experience. To put it more bluntly, the Christian is opposed to the demonic, whether in its common or its more bizarre manifestations.

The early church (by which I mean the apostolic church and the postapostolic church) understood these things. The martyrs (witnesses) and confessors of this whole period saw themselves in fixed battle positions. They were warring for the very life of the faith, for the life of the faith is truth. Thus, against every assault upon the truth, against every foe that refused to relinquish even the vestiges of paganism, they confessed their faith in one God in three persons. They confessed their belief in the Holy Spirit. "The church, though scattered through the whole world to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their discipline the *faith*...in the Holy Ghost...the firm persuasion also in the Spirit of God..." Further, the early church could say, "Moreover, the order of reason and the authority of faith, in due consideration of the words and Scriptures of the Lord, admonishes us, after this, to believe in the Holy Ghost." "They also delivered that the Holy Ghost was associated in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son." "We believe in ... the Holy Ghost given for consolation and sanctification and perfection to those who believe..." "So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.

And yet they are not three gods; but one God.”

Therefore, to confess the Christian faith is to confess the faith of the historic church. But it is more. To confess the Christian faith is to confess our faith in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments upon which the church is built.

And the testimony of both Testaments is to the history of God’s saving acts, culminating in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may even say that, when viewed from one perspective, the Scriptures are a history of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament we are confronted with God. He is speaking, acting, creating. How does this God act? By what means? He acts by His Word and by His Spirit. When God creates man, it is the same breath or spirit (Hebrew: *ruach*) that vivifies the apex of His creation which made chaos into cosmos at the beginning (Gen. 2:7 with 1:2). The communion enjoyed by the man and woman with God in the Garden was a communion in the Spirit (Gen. 3:8, where “cool” is “wind” or “breath,” or *ruach*). In the face of the violence and wickedness of the antediluvian world, God contended with men, repressing and controlling the extent of their evil by His Spirit (Gen. 6:3). Against the gods and lords of the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Babylonians, and others, God waged endless war through His appointed and anointed mediators, the prophets, the priests and the kings. They were weak and flawed men and women, but they possessed a difference; they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak, act, and do incredible things. Thus did God, the true and living God, Yahweh Elohim, manifest Himself as “God of gods and Lord of lords.” Finally, though not exhaustively, the whole prophetic enterprise of the old covenant is carried out by the Holy Spirit. “Men spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance.” “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The resultant effect of this, when drawn and gathered together, are the “holy Scriptures,”

which Paul can describe as “God breathed” (2 Tim. 3:14,16).

When we turn to the New Testament the personality and activity of the Holy Spirit are even more evident. The culminating act of all God’s saving acts is the person, words, and the works of Jesus. And from His conception, early life, baptism, temptation, preaching, miracles, speeches—to His death, resurrection and ascension—the Holy Spirit is the Invisible Agent. This fact is especially evident in Luke-Acts. And the careful Luke planned his work in just this way, so that the work which Jesus began in the Gospel is continued in the history of the early church, and by the same agency, the power of the Holy Spirit, manifested at Pentecost and evident everywhere else.

But the end of Acts is not the end of the story! The whole subsequent history of the Christian church is the ongoing history of the Holy Spirit working and acting, in spite of the sinfulness and weakness of that church and its agents, to establish the name of Jesus Christ throughout the whole world. It is just this last fact that signals the great change which occurred “in the fullness of the time” respecting the Holy Spirit. Because of the glorification of Jesus as the Christ, the Spirit has been “given” in a manner and modality that was not true before: He has been given as *the Spirit of Jesus*, the Christ (John 7:39).

It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God manifested in His role as “the Spirit of Jesus,” who makes the New Testament *New*. Jesus Himself spoke of this new thing (see the terminology, “in that day” in John 14-16) when He said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). How is this possible? The last words are key: “because I am going to the Father.” What follows explains this. “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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.... On that day you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me and I am in you" (John 14:16-18, 20). And what will be the work of the Spirit of truth in the church? He will remind you of the things spoken by Jesus (14:26). He will testify about Jesus (15:26). He will work conviction in the world, convicting men concerning Jesus: "... in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; and in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father... and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (by Jesus, cf. John 12:31, 27-33; John 16:9-11). Moreover, the Holy Spirit will disclose to the apostles further truth, truth which they are not now able to assimilate (16:13). In all of this, the Spirit will testify from and to Jesus (16:13), so that the net effect of His ministry will be to glorify Jesus as the Christ (16:13-15).

It is at this critical juncture that the history of the Holy Spirit and the history of the Christian church coincide, at least at those points where the church has been true to its mandate to glorify Jesus as Christ and Savior. Where the church has been and is an evangelical agent—preaching, teaching, ministering, caring, suffering—it has continued to fulfill the promise of Jesus in doing "greater things." The proof of this is the existence of this evangelical presence and influence in history and in the world, a presence and influence which shall finally extend to all nations, "and then the end shall come."

The hope which you and I may possess, which we do possess, in the face of the conflict of the ages, a conflict never hotter than today, is the hope, the confidence we have in Jesus' own promise concerning the Holy Spirit. We may confidently work for reformation and pray for revival, for the Holy Spirit is true Author of both. What we must

devote ourselves to in the process is the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus. Against all pseudospirituality, all superstition, all magic, against every attempt to exalt human standards of belief and action, we must maintain and proclaim the gospel, the good news that *Jesus is the Christ*. In this battle and for this cause, we may depend upon the Spirit's assistance. We may expect and anticipate His blessing. "He *will* bring glory to Me."

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