

“CHRISTIANITY 101: (#3) GOT SPIRIT?”

(Luke 3:15-17,21-22; Acts 1:8)

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[PROP NEEDED: Holy Spirit Video]

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1. **[WATCH VIDEO: "Holy Spirit" (from StudentLife, [WorshipHouseMedia.com](https://www.WorshipHouseMedia.com), 2:30)]**
2. Today as we continue our sermon series “*Christianity 101*”, learning some of the basic beliefs and practices of Christianity, our focus is on one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible: the **HOLY SPIRIT**... his nature, purpose and role in our spiritual lives.

A--In the Bible the word, “*spirit*” literally means “*wind*” or “*breath*” -- a reference to how the Holy Spirit brings God's life-giving breath to us in our spiritual lives. ¹

B--As you heard in the video, scripture also calls him *paraklete*/"*helper*," and several other titles: “*Advocate*,” “*Comforter*,” and “*Counselor*,” and in the KJV of our English Bible, he's called God's “*Holy Guest*” (Holy “*Ghost*”) in the life of a believer. ²

C--But by whatever name we use, the Holy Spirit is an extension of the very nature and character of God *Himself*.. ³
3. But **WHAT, exactly, is His purpose and role in our spiritual lives?** Why do you and I *need* Him in our Christian lives today?
4. Well, though the Bible talks about several answers to these questions, for the sake of time I want to focus on just 3 functions/roles of the Holy Spirit... all of which start with “C”.⁴

--II--

5. The first of these exists *before* we ever even have faith: ...to **CONVICT** us of sin so that we can understand our need for salvation and accept it for ourselves.

A--In this role, the Holy Spirit shares various manifestations of God's grace to help bring us to salvation:

1--Through something we Methodist Christians call “***Prevenient Grace***,” the Spirit acts to awaken in us a consciousness of our *need* for God, helping us to see and acknowledge the “sin” that separates us from a relationship with Him, and then *wooing* us back to a relationship with Him.

2--We find a sense of this in **today's first scripture from Luke 3**, where the Holy Spirit mysteriously draws people from all parts of Palestine to hear someone named John the Baptist. Listen to it's words (**Verses 15-17, 21-22**)...

15 The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. 16 John replied to them all, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out." ... 21 When everyone was being baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

B--As I mentioned last week, growing in a Christian home in East Point, GA, I received God's love and *prevenient* grace from my parents and Sunday School teachers, and it eventually brought me to a point (as a preteen) where I recognized that I wanted *more*.

6. This, in turn, led me to experience the second function of the Holy Spirit... to forgive and **CLEANSE** us of sin/brokenness, & refine us into the people that God wants us to be

A--This *initial* forgiveness is what we call "**Justifying Grace**," where God (because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross) *pardons* us and treats us "*just as if*" we never sinned (= *Just-If-I-cation*).

1--We call this by a variety of terms: "*accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior*," "*conversion*"; being "*born again*"; or "*saved*."

2--And (as I mentioned last week) it's what I experienced over the course of 2-3 summers while attending our Methodist youth camp in Dahlonega, GA (Camp Glisson) -- something that changed my life forever. ⁵

B--Yet, Verses 16-17 of today's Luke scripture tells us that simply accepting Jesus as Lord is not all there is to Christian faith... that he comes to "*baptize [us] with the Holy Spirit and fire*... to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. ...[To] clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn [and]... burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out." ⁶

1--In other words, even after we accept Jesus as Lord of our lives, the Holy Spirit also *continues* to cleanse us of things that which are still not God-honoring, washing us of the "*sin that remains*" -- he's like a spiritual detergent!

2--And through this process of what we call "**Sanctification/ Sanctifying Grace**," we are made more and more "holy" = more and more like Jesus over the course of the *rest of our lives*. ⁷

3--And THIS is what I've been working on from the time I gave my life to Jesus as a preteen up until today.

7. Yet, a final function/role of the Holy Spirit that we often forget is to **COMMISSION** (i.e., to equip and empower) each and every believer for ministry and work in our world.

A--In today's **second scripture from Acts 1:8**, Jesus tells his disciples that "*you will receive power [Greek *dunamus* = "dynamite"] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

B--Too often, you & I today try to live the Christian life using only our own abilities ...we trust our own skills and business-savvy, or our great intellect, or our finances, to make it, and sometimes (even as Christians) leave God out *entirely*.

1--And when we do, we forget that without the Holy Spirit, there *is* no real power for success in life or ministry *at all*.

2--Perhaps that's one reason why Jesus didn't preach or do any miracles until *after* his baptism that we read about today... because it wasn't until *then* that he received God's commissioning *power* to go out and actually *DO* ministry!

3--Likewise, without *us* recognizing & tapping into that same commissioning power, you and I can never hope to accomplish ministry in Jesus' name.

4--As author Croft Pentz puts it, "*If you have the Holy Spirit on the inside, you can stand any kind of battle on the outside.*" ⁸

C--And to equip us to do this, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit not only gives to each and every Christian various "**Spiritual Gifts**" (like wisdom, leadership, teaching, and a whole host of others), ⁹...

D--...But also grows *within* us various "**Fruit of the Spirit**" which rise *out of* our daily walk with God -- things like "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, & generosity*" ¹⁰-- so that the more closely we walk with God/Jesus, the more evident these "fruit" will be.

--III--

8. The bottom line is that as great and important as it is to give our hearts and lives to Jesus as Lord of our life, both of today's scriptures teach us that *that alone* cannot change or make a difference in us *without* the accompanying power/presence of the Holy Spirit.

A--His presence in us doesn't make us "*better than anybody else*"-- it simply makes us "*better than we'd be without Him.*" ¹¹

B--Maybe you're a spiritual seeker today, looking for tips on how to be a better spouse, family member, parent, child, student, boss, or worker.

1--Maybe you're a new believer, trying to make sense of all this Christian stuff that you've committed yourself to.

2--Or perhaps you've been a Christian all your life, but have never really understood about the Holy Spirit.

C--Well, regardless of where you (or any one of us are in our spiritual walk), I want to encourage us all to open ourselves (perhaps for the first time; perhaps for the 100th) to the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit...

D---...who can come alongside us (and even *within* us), to *CONVICT* and *CLEANSE* us of sin, and to *COMMISSION* us for life and ministry in today's world.¹²

9. A few years back, there was a dairy products advertising campaign that asked the simple question, "*Got milk?*"

A--Well, as we wrap up today, the question I want to ask is *not* simply if we've "*Got Jesus?*" (that's important, but it's *not* all there is to being a Christian)

B--No. The question is... have we *also* "***God Spirit?***" -- the Holy Spirit of God Himself -- to empower us to live the Christian life?

10. [*PRAY... for those who are new Christians to receive empowerment of Spirit, & for those who've been Christians all life & never understood to open themselves to that power...*]
11. [SUGGESTED CLOSING SONG: #334, "Sweet, Sweet Spirit", #393, "Spirit of the Living God", OR #420, "Breathe On Me, Breath of God"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ The Old Testament Hebrew term is *ruach*; the New Testament Greek term is *pneuma*, both of which can mean "spirit," "wind," or "breath."

² The phrase "*Holy Ghost*" has its roots in the old Anglo-Saxon word for "*guest*", making Holy Spirit is truly a "*holy guest*" in the life of a Christian.

³ In this sense, it might be helpful to think of the Holy Spirit not so much as a *third* spiritual being separate from God the Father or God the Son, but as a paradoxical way to describe the love that exists *between* God the Father and God the Son -- as the glue, if you will, who binds all dimensions of God together. If so, then one way to think of the Spirit's relationship to us is to view God the Father as God FOR us; God the Son as God WITH us; and God the Holy Spirit as God WITHIN us. And this, by the way, is precisely why we refer to the Spirit not as an impersonal "It," but using personal pronouns ("He" or "She"). What's more is that, unlike what some people might think, the Holy Spirit is *not* the property of charismatic/Pentecostal Christians or churches. Instead, He is and has been an important and integral part of nearly every Christian theological tradition since the beginning of the church 2000 years ago. For example, much of the ministry of John Wesley and the early Methodists in both England and America centered around the person, power, and work of the Spirit. So then, to be truly "Christian" is to acknowledge presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

⁴ The first two of these is accomplished before we ever even accept Christ into our hearts. The final two are accomplished after we accept Christ and become a Christian.

⁵ Some may question my reference to the fact that this happened "over the course of 2-3 summers..." Biblically, though, conversion/being born again does NOT always happen all at one time! Some people (like Peter and the other 10 faithful disciples, minus Judas) experience their conversion over a course of time (like Peter and the disciples' 3 years' of ministry with Jesus). I call this a "sunrise" conversion -- watching a sunrise, you don't really know exactly *when* the sun peeked above the horizon, but you know it happened! Yet, other people (like the apostle Paul) experience conversion in a single instant (like Paul's Damascus Road encounter with Jesus). I often call this a "lightening bolt" conversion -- where it happens "in a moment" and things are suddenly different. But BOTH of these methods of being "born again"/"saved"/"converted" are *equally valid and equally biblical!* I happened to have experienced the former version (a "sunrise" conversion over the course of 2-3 summers visiting Camp Glisson; I cannot tell you a time and date where it happened, nor do I need to; but I know it happened!

⁶ Malachi 3:3 refers to God's Spirit as a "*refiner's fire*" and a "*fuller's soap*" -- who comes to cleanse/ "*purify*" us daily of the things we do wrong... sort of like spiritual "detergent."

⁷ I.E., to be more and more "*holy*" or "*sanctified*" each and every moment of each and every day.

⁸ Croft M. Pentz, The Complete Book of Zingers (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1990). Of course, the reverse of this is also true: if we *lack* the Holy Spirit on the inside, we may fall prey to whatever is happening to or around us on the outside!

⁹ For several lists of various "Spiritual Gifts / Gifts of the Holy Spirit," read 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, Romans 12:1-8, Ephesians 4:1-16, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

¹⁰ Read Galatians 5:22-23 for the full listing of these "fruits of the Spirit."

¹¹ So the question is *not*, "*Do you have the Holy Spirit?*" If you've been baptized as a Christian believer, then you do -- the question is, "*Does the Holy Spirit have you?*"

¹² For example, as some of the other roles mentioned in the beginning of my sermon: as Comforter, Counselor, Communicator with God, Helper (Greek *paraclete*), etc.