

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

I Believe In The Holy Ghost

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Acts 1:6-11 and various texts

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bible to Acts 1. Today, as we continue our study through the Apostle's Creed, we are going to be considering the line:

I believe in the Holy Ghost

Before we dive into our text for this morning, I want to begin with a very practical question:

Why Is So Little Attention Given To The Holy Ghost In The Creed?

That's a fair question. After all, the Holy Ghost – or the Holy Spirit as we commonly refer to Him today – is the third Person of the Trinity. As Wayne Grudem summarizes:

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.¹

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 226.

The Holy Spirit is a PERSON – which is to say that He is not to be referred to as “it.” The Holy Spirit is not a force or a power that derives from God – He IS God. He is equal with the Father and the Son. We baptize believers in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that there is no Christian who is not indwelt by the Spirit. As Charles Spurgeon once said:

He is your credentials as a Christian: he is your life as a believer.²

So, if that is who the Holy Ghost is, then I think it’s worth asking why so much wordcount is devoted to the explanation of the Person and work of Christ in the Apostle’s Creed when so little is devoted to the Person of the Father or the Holy Ghost.

Why is the creed so disproportionately weighted towards Jesus? Was it because these earliest believers didn’t think we needed to know much about the Father or the Holy Ghost? Are they any less significant or magnificent than Jesus? Let me give you two quick answers to this question.

The first is a very practical reason – the primary source of confusion in the early church revolved around misunderstandings about Jesus. Some argued that he was not truly man. Others argued that he was not truly God. Serious contention surrounding the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, didn’t arise until the 4th century with the advent of the heresy of pneumatomachianism – a heresy that argued that the Holy Spirit was a created being. Heavy word count was devoted to the doctrine of Christ, because the doctrine of Christ was the theological battleground of the day.

That’s one explanation for the proportions in this Creed, but this second reason is the most significant. These early believers placed a heavy emphasis on the person and work of Jesus because they understood that to see and savour Jesus IS to see and savour the Godhead. For example, when Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus replied:

Whoever has seen me **has seen the Father**. (John 14:9b ESV)

Likewise, Colossians 1:15 tells us of Jesus that:

² C. H. Spurgeon as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. [*The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*](#). Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7140.

He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15a ESV)

In fact, the more we come to understand about the Holy Ghost, the more we will *want* to talk about Jesus, because the Spirit works to direct our attention and affection to Christ. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said:

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 14:6 ESV)

That's what the Spirit delights to do! He points us to Christ who is the image of the invisible God! Albert Mohler is helpful here. He notes:

Where you find the Spirit of God present, you do not find so much testimony *about* the Holy Spirit as you find a testimony about Christ. Where you find, therefore, a bold, biblical, urgent, accurate, enthusiastic, joyful, and life-changing testimony of Christ, you can rest assured that the Holy Spirit is vibrantly at work.³

So, we celebrate and revere and worship the triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – but we unapologetically give our primary emphasis to the person and work of Jesus because that is what God has called us to do! The Triune God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world through the Son. The Father sends, the Spirit magnifies, and Jesus – the Word made flesh – redeems and restores.

That is why, comparatively speaking, so little attention is given to the Holy Ghost in the Apostle's Creed. It is not an indication of *importance*. It is an indication of *appropriate emphasis*. And that is important to understand. Hear this: One of the primary ways that we can go astray as we turn our attention to the Holy Spirit is that we can misdirect our emphasis. We can become so enamoured with the Holy Spirit that we become inappropriately fixated on Him. Suddenly all of our prayers are addressed to the Spirit and all of our attention is given to the Spirit. But that would be to miss the mark entirely. The Holy Spirit actively works to direct our attention to the Son!

That said, I confess that the person and work of the Spirit deserves more attention than we typically give Him in our sliver of evangelicalism. To that end, over the next few years, my desire

³ R. Albert Mohler Jr. *The Apostle's Creed - Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 140-141.

is to make a concerted effort to bolster our understanding of the Holy Spirit and His role in the church and in our lives.

This morning, we are going to come at this doctrine with a focused approach. In particular, I feel compelled to revisit the text that we studied last week. Let's do that now. Look now with me to Acts 1:6-11. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When we studied this text last Sunday, we highlighted the promised return of Christ and then we unpacked the assignment that he entrusted to us. He called us to be his witnesses to an unbelieving and hostile world. He called us to a task that seems all but impossible.

And not only is the mission impossible, but the servants are weak! I don't know about you, but if I were drawing up a dream team for world evangelism, I wouldn't put my name on the list! As I look out over my neighbourhood and then look back at myself, I wonder, "God, is this really the plan? Me?"

Some of us are so overwhelmed by the impossibility of the assignment and the inadequacies that we see in ourselves that we're too discouraged to even try.

But, do you remember what we discussed a few weeks ago about two-handed works? There are some things that God simply does for us. Things like salvation. We didn't have anything to do with that. We were dead, and then God picked us up and made us alive. That was a one-handed work. But with two-handed works, God gives us impossible tasks and then calls us to work at

them. And, even though they are far too heavy for us – even though our effort shouldn't make any difference at all – as we push, God lifts!

I think some of us lost sight of that last Sunday. Yes, Jesus entrusted us with what feels like an impossible assignment, but he also gave us what we would need for that assignment. He promised:

But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8a ESV)

It's not as if Jesus had a naïve overestimation of his disciples' abilities. He knows our weaknesses. He knows that we are afraid and awkward and inconsistent and inexperienced. He knows. But he's not concerned. And do you know why he's not concerned?

Because he has given the church POWER! Because he has sent the Holy Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity – to work in us and through us in ways that we could never even begin to imagine!

So, this morning, let's ask the question:

In What Ways Does The Holy Spirit Empower Us?

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, the disciples were struggling with the reality that a day was coming when Jesus would not be with them physically. They were discouraged, but he reassured them:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: **it is to your advantage that I go away**, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7 ESV)

Try to put yourself in the disciples' shoes. Jesus has been walking on water, silencing storms, healing the sick, restoring the blind, casting out demons all while maintaining a teaching ministry that was unlike anything that anyone had ever heard. At which point he says, "It is to your advantage that I go away." I suspect that each disciple immediately replied in his mind, "No it is NOT! Are you kidding me?!"

Let me ask you this: If you had the opportunity right now to trade the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in all of our people for the physical presence of Jesus in Orillia, would you do it? Be

honest. Imagine all of the ministry that would be accomplished in this city if Jesus himself were here ministering!

Here's the crazy thing – Jesus unambiguously declared that we would be fools to make that trade! He taught us that we are better equipped for ministry with the Holy Spirit in us than we would be if Jesus were physically ministering right beside us! I don't think we believe that yet. Flip ahead with me to Acts 2. Here, in the day of Pentecost, we find the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the power that would come upon his people. Look with me at verses 1-11:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (Acts 2:1-11 ESV)

In what ways does the Holy Spirit empower us? Well, the first thing we see here is that:

1. He empowers our witness

That is the most obvious lesson from this scene at Pentecost. Remember, Jesus had just commissioned his disciples to share the gospel with the whole world! You can just imagine them sitting in their prayer meeting wondering, "How in the world are we going to bring the gospel to the Parthians and the Egyptians? It will take us YEARS to learn their language!"

And then the Holy Spirit anointed these men and as they opened their mouths, the gospel came forth in the languages of all the surrounding nations. And the gospel witness was heard and understood by all who gathered in to hear. The Holy Spirit empowers our witness.

One of the primary reasons why many Christians are afraid to evangelize is because they're worried about what they will say. But, if we understood the power of the Holy Spirit, we would put those worries to rest. And that's not my opinion. Jesus said:

When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.²⁰ **For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.** (Matthew 10:19-20 ESV)

When we understand the work of the Holy Spirit, we begin to realize that evangelism is more an exercise of *faith* than it is an exercise of *intellect*. He will give us the words when we need them.

The Holy Spirit also empowers our witness by giving people ears to hear. Do you remember when Jesus said that it was good for us that he was going? Well, look with me again at that verse, but then let's keep reading to the verse that follows. In John 16:7-8 Jesus says:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.⁸ And when he comes, **he will convict the world concerning** sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-8 ESV)

It is the Spirit of God that brings conviction. Robert Murray McCheyne notes:

The first work of the Spirit on the natural heart is to *reprove the world of sin*. Although He is the Spirit of love, although a dove is His emblem, although He be compared to the soft wind and gentle dew; still His first work is to convince of sin.⁴

I can study for twenty hours to prepare a sermon, and I can draft a coherent outline and pepper in useful illustrations, and I can preach that sermon with every last ounce of passion and enthusiasm and earnestness in my body, but if the Spirit of God does not first bring conviction, then my sermon will amount to absolutely NOTHING. That's why the great preacher Charles Spurgeon would always recite the words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost" as he made his way up to the pulpit to preach. Please continue to lift up my preaching ministry in prayer.

⁴ Robert Murray McCheyne as quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World's Great Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 382.

And I'll lift up your evangelism in prayer, because the same is true for you as you attempt to share the gospel with your neighbour. You can spend months drafting the perfect plan. You can knock on their door holding their favourite dessert and share with them the clearest, most comprehensive explanation of the gospel in history, but all of that will be met with blank stares unless the Spirit of God first brings conviction.

Therefore, let's resolve to spend less time worrying and plotting and more time praying and stepping out in faith. Try this: Pray this week for the opportunity to share the gospel with your neighbour. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict their heart and to give you the words to speak. Ask for an opportunity. As you're walking on the sidewalk and you see your neighbour approaching, pull a Spurgeon and declare under your breath, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." And then, as your neighbour approaches and the weight of that impossibly heavy bar feels like it's going to crush you, PUSH! Open up your mouth as an act of faith and obedience and speak. And watch as the Holy Spirit empowers your witness.

Second, the Holy Spirit empowers our unity.

2. He empowers our unity

Perhaps that seems like a curious point to make, but one of the things that we are meant to see in this scene at Pentecost is the reversal of the tower of Babel. Do you remember that story? As mankind progressed further and further into sin, they moved further and further from Eden. Eventually, in a display of arrogance and pride, the people came together to build a tower that would reach to the heavens. But God put an end to their plot by causing them to break out into a number of diverse languages such that they couldn't communicate with one another.

One of the effects of sin is that it divides us. But God's plan of redemption is one that will ultimately bring us back together. In the final scene of God's plan of redemption, we will see all of the nations worshiping together before the throne. That scene is described in Revelation 7:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with

a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”
(Revelation 7:9-10 ESV)

This story ends with the diverse people of God united together in praise and adoration! And isn't it a sweet foretaste of heaven when we see glimpses of that diversity and unity here on earth?

Hear this: A large part of our witness is our unity! Jesus said that. He told the disciples:

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
(John 13:35 ESV)

Authentic and diverse fellowship and unity that extends beyond national lines and political spectrums and age brackets is a COMPELLING TESTIMONY to the world! But THAT unity is simply not humanly possible. If there is one thing that I have learned this past year, it is that division is easy, but unity is hard. It doesn't take a lot of work to divide a group of people. As it turns out, you can do it with a small piece of fabric.

Division is easy. It's natural. But unity? That is a work of the Spirit.

The unity that was on display on the day of Pentecost was a supernatural unity. When God anointed the disciples with His Holy Spirit, He taught them that the Spirit empowered preaching of the gospel had the power to knock down walls of division!

And He can do that again today. Let's continue to ask the Spirit of God to bind us together in unity.

Third, the Holy Spirit empowers our holiness.

3. He empowers our holiness

We bear witness to Christ with our words, but we also bear witness with our transformed lives. Your freedom from addiction testifies to the power of the gospel. Your transformed marriage testifies to the power of the gospel. Your growth in holiness preaches a sermon to the watching world.

And that growth in holiness doesn't come from you. It is the powerful work of the Spirit in your life. The Apostle Paul wrote:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. **For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.** (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

I know that you've heard this before, but I want to encourage you to come back to this truth once again: If you are a Christian, then the Holy Spirit is in you. And if the Holy Spirit is in you, then He is going to help you grow! Believe that!

Now, sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it's two months of a healthy marriage and then one month of strain. Two days of patience with the kids and one day of anger. Two hours of pure thoughts and one more bout with temptation. Growth in holiness is hard.

But you have received POWER! You have! The Holy Spirit is in you, and He is changing you. When you regress, He's convicting you of sin. He's slowly and steadily maturing you in the faith, and as you grow, the fruit of the Spirit is going to become more and more evident in your life. In Galatians 5, we read about this fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV)

He's going to grow that fruit in you! And He's going to do it by giving supernatural power to ordinary means. As you sit under sermons and as you read your Bible, the Holy Spirit is going to help you to understand and He's going to bring conviction and illumination in all of the places where it's needed. As John Calvin said:

God does not bestow his Spirit on his people in order to set aside the use of his Word, but rather to render it fruitful.⁵

⁵ John Calvin as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. [*The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*](#). Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7094.

The Holy Spirit takes ordinary things and uses them to accomplish extraordinary results. Ordinary people, ordinary sermons, ordinary study, ordinary prayer, ordinary obedience – He empowers all of those things to do the extraordinary work of taking broken, sinful people and transforming them into holy examples of God’s sanctifying power.

There is so much more that we could say this morning, but I want to end with one last point. How does the Holy Spirit empower us?

4. He empowers our perseverance

Listen: The Christian life is not easy.

It is joy-filled, and rewarding, and meaningful, and vibrant, and glorious! But it is not easy. Jesus said:

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ **For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life**, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV)

It’s hard. So hard, in fact, that apart from the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, not one of us would make it.

As we walk this narrow road, the enemy points at our sin and our weaknesses and he whispers in our ears, “You are no child of God! You are an imposter! You don’t belong here!” Many have abandoned the road at the sound of that condemning voice. But, if you are a Christian, there is another voice whispering in your ear. He speaks over the voice of the accuser. Romans 8:16-17 says:

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16-17 ESV)

When the tempter would prevail, the Holy Spirit reminds you who you are in Christ! In fact, one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to seal you as a blood-bought child of God! In the same way that ancient kings would press their signet rings into the wax seal on a letter to signify

its authenticity, God has placed the seal of the Holy Spirit in your heart to signify YOUR authenticity! That's the language that Paul uses in Ephesians 1:13-14:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, **were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14 ESV)

How can the enemy steal our hope? The Holy Spirit is the GUARANTEE that we will obtain the inheritance that God has for us.

And the Holy Spirit prays for you! Did you know that? When you sit down to pray, and you feel like you're not even making sense and you don't even know what it is that you should be asking for, the Holy Spirit is empowering your prayer and He's asking the Father for every single thing that you need. We see that in Romans 8:26-27:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, **but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words**.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27 ESV)

Isn't that amazing? The effectiveness of your prayer has nothing to do with the eloquence of your speech or the clarity of your thought. It is the Holy Spirit that makes your prayer powerful. As Charles Spurgeon once said:

If you could pray the best prayer in the world without the Holy Spirit, God would have nothing to do with it.⁶

And the Holy Spirit pours the love of God out into your heart! Romans 5:5 says:

and hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit** who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5 ESV)

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7141.

The Holy Spirit pours out God's love into your heart when you feel unlovable. He prays for you when you feel like you don't have the words. He seals you when you wonder if your faith is authentic. He reminds you of who you are when the enemy would condemn you. The Holy Spirit empowers your perseverance as you live and minister in a difficult world that is wasting away.

As we conclude, I want to revisit where we landed last Sunday. One more time, I want you to get up off your couch and I want you to walk over to your window. Look again at those houses on your street. Remind yourself again that there are eternal souls living in those houses – men and women and boys and girls who will stand before the perfectly righteous Judge. I'm going to read Acts 1:8 to you one more time, but this morning, as you hear your assignment, I want to make sure that you first hear your provision. Hear now the word of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

You will – you HAVE – received power! Power for gospel witness! Power for unity! Power for holiness! Power for perseverance! The Holy Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity – GOD HIMSELF is IN YOU! So, look out that window. What have you to fear? Can God change those hearts? Yes! Can God give you the words that you need? Yes! Can God bring conviction and repentance? Yes! Can God save every single man, woman, boy and girl on your street? YES, YES, YES!

So the question is not, "Can He do it?" He can. The question is not, "Has He given me what I need?" He has. The real question is, "Do I believe?"

Look out that window. If you believe, then proclaim it with me now.

I believe in the Holy Ghost.

Christian, God just heard you say that. Don't be surprised if He gives you an opportunity this week to prove it. To that end, let's pray together.