



## Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

---

University Reformed Church

4930 S. Hagadorn Rd., E. Lansing, MI 48823 - 517.351.6810

*Lord's Day 20* - May 18, 2008

---

**Q.** *What do you believe concerning “the Holy Spirit”?*

**A.** First, he, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God. Second, he has been given to me personally, so that, by true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his blessings, comforts me, and remains with me forever.

---

Many Christians rarely think about the Holy Spirit. God the Father we know about. God the Son we think about all the time. But God the Holy Spirit? There are fewer songs to him, fewer meditations about him, and fewer churches named after him.

But this may not be altogether a bad thing. Granted, it is very possible, even likely, that traditional conservative Christians know too little about, and cherish too lightly, the person and work of the Holy Spirit. But before we pursue this criticism too far, we need to remember that the New Testament itself says a great deal more about Jesus Christ and God the Father than it does about the Spirit. So the imbalance is reflective of the Bible itself. More importantly, we must not forget that the work of the Holy Spirit is first of all to glorify Christ (John 16:14). So whether we realize it or not, we are very intimately connected with the work of the Spirit, because wherever we are drawn to Christ as Savior, led to worship Christ as Lord, made to behold Christ as glorious, we are being operated on by the Holy Spirit. The focus of most of our churches (like the Creed and the Catechism) is on Christ and not the Spirit, because that’s the focus of the apostolic gospel, the New Testament, and the Holy Spirit himself! Of course, this is not to suggest that singing to the Holy Spirit or worshiping him is inappropriate. Far from it. Every person of the trinity is equally glorious and deserving of praise. But Spirit-led worship has at its heart not an emotive experience (though emotions are good) nor a spontaneous feel (though spontaneity isn’t bad), but rather a Christ-exalting, cross-focused, word-centered event where the name of Jesus is praised in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

Answer 53 outlines the doctrine of the Holy Spirit using two broad categories: the person and the work of the Spirit. We’ll start with the first category. The Holy Spirit is not a force or a principle of nature or a part of God or mode of his existence. The Holy Spirit is a person—a teaching (Luke 12:11-12), speaking (Acts 13:2), interceding (Rom. 8:26), grieving (Eph. 4:30) person—distinct from the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is eternal God. He is everywhere, which does not mean the Spirit is everything or in everything, but rather that there is nowhere we can go where the Spirit isn’t also present (Psalm 139:7). The Spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14). The Spirit alone knows the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit is fully divine, his name being used interchangeably with the name “God” (see Acts 5:3-4 where lying to God and lying to the Holy Spirit are equated and 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19 where the temple of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit are used synonymously). The Holy Spirit is active in our salvation along with the Father and the Son (1 Peter 1:1-2). Jesus commands his disciples to be baptized in the name (singular) of all three persons (plural) of the Trinity, underlying the equality of rank, power, and majesty among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while also emphasizing their fundamental unity (Matt. 28:19; cf. 2 Cor. 13:14).

The second category concerns the *work* of the Holy Spirit. The first thing the Catechism notes here is that the Holy Spirit “has been given to me personally.” The Holy Spirit is not simply an omnipresent being that is with us in the sense that he is everywhere and so wherever we go there he will be also. The Spirit lives within us (1 Cor. 6:19)

and makes his dwelling in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6). We have fellowship with him (2 Cor. 13:14). This physical imagery should not be understood spatially as if the Spirit gets his mail delivered in the upper left chamber of that beating muscle in the chest. Rather, the Spirit dwells in us by animating our personality, shaping our character, renewing our minds, and stirring our emotions. His presence is not a physical residence as much as an experienced reality.

The Catechism goes on to mention three benefits we experience through work of the Holy Spirit. (Note: the words “by faith” in the Catechism are important. The Spirit does not work to make anonymous Christians who have the blessings of Christ apart from belief in Christ. The benefits are only ours by faith. It is by trusting in Christ, resting in Christ, and depending solely upon Christ that the Holy Spirit works in us.) The first benefit is that we share in Christ and all his blessings. The Father appoints us for salvation in the Son. The Son accomplishes the work of redemption given to him by the Father. And the Spirit applies the blessings purchased for us by the Son. This means God’s smile toward his Son is a smile toward us as well. When we are tempted to despair or question our standing before God, we must turn our eyes from introspection to crucifixion. Surely the perfect Son of God who fulfilled the law and obeyed his Father’s will in all things, even to the point of death on a cross has God’s approval. Surely God looks upon Christ with favor and pleasure. Surely Christ’s work on the cross was enough to merit our forgiveness and redemption. Surely if anyone is blessed of God it is his Son. And by the Spirit, we too now share in all his blessings. We too are looked upon with favor. Everything Christ accomplished is ours. All he won is ours. The promised inheritance of Abraham is ours (Gal. 3:14). All this and more because we belong to Christ and Christ’s blessings belong to us through ministrations of the Spirit.

The second benefit is the Holy Spirit’s comfort. Most of us have heard that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter (John 14:16 KJV). Other translations render *paracletos* a “Helper” (ESV), a “Counselor” (NIV), or an “Advocate” (NRSV), but the truth is still there: God comforts his people by the Holy Spirit. This happens in a number of ways. The Spirit may supernaturally strengthen your soul and give you a peace that passes understanding or a calm confidence in the work of the Lord (Acts 9:31). He may also comfort you through other Christians as you share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of truth, he will often speak to you through the Word of God, leading you into all truth (John 16:12), encouraging you with the words of Scripture he inspired and now illuminates. He may cause you to remember a precious biblical truth or direct your thoughts to the finished work of Christ or give you eyes to see more clearly the glory of God. The Spirit may comfort you with the gift of assurance so that you more boldly embrace your new identity in Christ and more firmly trust the promise of eternal life. There are more ways to be comforted I’m sure. The important thing is that we really chew on what it means to be comforted by the Spirit, lest we simply repeat nice (and true) platitudes like “the Holy Spirit is a comforter” without stopping to think what this looks like, how we will experience it, and what to pray for in our discouragement.

The third benefit is the Holy Spirit’s presence forever. Even though I’ve been a Christian as long as I can remember and have studied lots of theology and preached lots of sermons, I can’t even recall all the times while doing this study on the Heidelberg Catechism that I’ve stopped and said to myself, “I’ve never thought of that before.” This is another one of those moments. I’ve never thought about Jesus’ promise that the Holy Spirit would be with us forever (John 14:16). Heaven is heaven, right? So what’s the big deal about having the Holy Spirit for eternity? Having the Spirit in this life, that’s cool, but forever seems kind of redundant. But Jesus’ promise must mean something. I imagine the Spirit in heaven will continue to keep us holy, only now without any possibility of rebellion. He will continue to teach us more about the inexhaustible riches of Christ, only now without ever forgetting a single lesson. He will continue to be the personal bond that unites believers in fellowship, only now without division or disappointment. And He will continue, with perfect effectiveness, unmarred by our sin, to minister to us the presence of God the Father and God the Son, who together with the Holy Spirit is triune God, blessed forevermore, Amen.