

The Holy Spirit

A twelve-point summary of some important truths

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1. The Holy Spirit is fully God—coeternal, co-creative, coequal and consubstantial with the Father and Son—and therefore worthy, as the Nicene Creed puts it, “to be worshipped and glorified” together with the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is not a lesser deity. United in essence and bound in love, each member of the holy Trinity is perfectly contained within the other, such that where one is, the others are also. This interpenetration of being is historically referred to as *circumincession* (Latin) or *perichoresis* (Greek).
2. All three members of the holy Trinity work together in creation, redemption and the consummation of God’s eternal plans. In other words, we are not to think the Three are siloed in their work. For example, one common error is to ascribe creation to the Father, redemption to the Son and consummation to the Spirit. This is incorrect. The doctrine of “inseparable operations” has been part of the orthodox tradition since Nicaea.
3. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325, 381) provides the fundamental grammar for speaking of the holy Trinity and still represents the hallmark of orthodox Trinitarianism. The few non-Nicene splinter groups (e.g., Oneness Pentecostalism) notwithstanding, all the major subtraditions of Christianity (Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) subscribe to the Creed and are therefore known as Nicene Christians.
4. The “filioque controversy” took place when the Western (Roman Catholic) Church unilaterally added the words “and the Son” (Latin: *filioque*) to the third article of the Creed at the Council of Toledo in 589 (“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*”). This became the primary theological basis for the Great Schism of 1054 in which the Eastern and Western churches split. The filioque clause was galling to the Eastern Church for two reasons. First, it presupposes a different understanding of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and Son held by the Nicene Fathers. Second, the clause was added without ecumenical consensus (without discussing the matter with the Eastern Orthodox Church), which was a massive breach of ecclesiastical protocol and relational trust.

5. The Eastern Church understands the Holy Spirit to proceed from the Father alone, just as the Son is begotten of the Father alone. Since Augustine, the Western Church understands the Spirit to proceed from the Father and Son together, the instantiation of the bond of love between them. This is called the doctrine of “double procession” and is the standard teaching in both Catholic and Protestant traditions today.
6. Human beings were created to live in vital connection with God by means of His Spirit, sharing in the divine life. We were not designed to function autonomously, independent of God’s light, power and love but in moment-by-moment dependence upon Him. Just as light bulbs depend on an external power source to be fully “light bulb-ish” (functioning as they were intended), so humans depend on the presence of the Holy Spirit in us to be fully human. To not be filled, empowered and animated by God’s Spirit would make a person, in a very real sense, less than human (i.e., less than humans were created by God to be).
7. All humans are born in sin and in need of being “born again”, baptized by the Spirit into Christ and filled with the Spirit’s life, love, power, wisdom and fruit. Moreover, we must be “filled with the Spirit” regularly because we tend to “leak”. The Spirit seals the Christian for the day of redemption, bears witness with our spirits that we are God’s children and incrementally transfigures us into the image of Jesus Christ, a process that will be finally completed in the life to come.
8. Each of us is called to walk in the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, not grieve, resist or quench the Spirit’s work in and among us. We are to invite His continuous leading in our lives and obey His promptings. And we are to regularly use His gifts to minister to others, desiring the “greater gifts” like prophesy to optimally build up the body of Christ and witness to the world.
9. During His earthly ministry, Jesus did all his miracles by means of being guided, gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. He did not use His divine nature to accomplish these things, for he had “emptied himself” by foregoing the use of His divine prerogatives upon His incarnation. (While remaining fully divine, He voluntarily suspended the use of his divine powers in order to be fully human as the “Son of Man” or “last Adam”.) Jesus thus became the new “head” of a new humanity in place of Adam, a new human prototype filled with the Holy Spirit and able to do miraculous works by means of the Spirit’s power. By living in daily obedience to the Father under the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus set the pattern for how each believer is to live and minister. If we are to experience His “life to the fullest”, we must, as His apprentices, imitate His way of life. This is what Christian discipleship of spiritual formation is all about: living in the ways of Christ, our Head.

10. God gave spiritual gifts (*charismata*) to the early Church ranging from under-the-radar endowments like administration, service, mercy and teaching to the uber-spectacular gifts like tongues, healings and prophesy. These gifts were and are distributed in each church by the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit. We are not to envy nor despise other's gifts. At the same time, we are to eagerly desire those gifts, like prophesy, that build up the Church and strengthen her witness in the world. We should each pray for God to equip us for every human encounter and each divine assignment.
11. Continuationists are believers who teach that all spiritual gifts, including the so-called "sign gifts", have continued uninterrupted since Pentecost and are, therefore, still in operation today and vitally needed for the work of the Gospel. Some continuations believe in the "sign gifts" in theory only: they believe in them but do not regularly seek or practice them. Others are continuationist in both theory and practice. All the Church's major subtraditions—Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Protestant—are continuationist at least in theory. Pentecostals, Charismatics and "Third Wave" believers are continuationist in both theory and practice.

Cessationists, on the other hand, teach that the more spectacular gifts ceased at the close of the Apostolic era (traditionally, upon the death of John) and the completion of the New Testament canon. They claim these gifts had been given to authenticate the message of Christ during the formative years of the Church and that, having accomplished their aim, were withdrawn once the NT was completed, since there was no longer the need for authenticating the Gospel (1 Cor 13:8-12). While many churches are cessationist in practice, theoretical cessationist churches are found mostly in those denominations with roots in nineteenth century rationalism and Dispensationalism.

12. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. As God, the Spirit is truth and leads us into all truth. One of the ministries of the Spirit is to empower us to make courageous stands to speak the truth and act according to it, even when doing so results in persecution. To help us, the Holy Spirit emboldens us and gives us the right words to speak in challenging situations. We cannot hope to be build integrity in the Church apart for the Spirit's ongoing operations in our individual lives and our life together.