

The Apostle's Creed: I Believe in the Holy Ghost

Ephesians 1:13-14

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 1:13-14. We arrive now at the third part of the Apostles' Creed as we continue to work through this great Christian confession of faith. This part of the Creed gives us the completion of our profession of the Trinity. We began with "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and immediately went to "I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord." Then, a long explanation of the incarnational work of Jesus Christ, and then back to the profession, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Now, notice how the Creed moves from the creating work of the Father to the rescuing work of the Son, and then to the recreating work of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who works in us to bring to bear all the benefits of Jesus' work and to make us into a new creation.

Today, there is much confusion regarding the Holy Spirit. Some think of the Spirit as an it a thing, a force, and not a person. While others, when they think of the Holy Spirit, can think only of the charismatic controversy. But the Holy Spirit is the executive of the Trinity. He is a divine, active person carrying out the designs of the Father, and applying the benefits of the Son to all His people. So it's vital for us to understand His person and His work, and to understand what is entailed in saying that "we believe in the Holy Spirit."

Now what about the Holy Ghost? That's the version we still say in the Creed because that's the version we've been saying in the English language since about the 16th century, and Holy ghost is 16th century English. In 16th century English, ghost referred to that unit of psychic energy in man, the soulish aspect, the spiritish aspect of man, and of course in Scripture, as ghost meant that, it was a good translation of the Hebrew and Greek words for spirit that were used in both Old and New Testaments to refer to personal energy, whether human or divine. Ghost generally means something a little different today, so our modern Bible translations prefer to translate this as Holy Spirit, but that's where the terminology came from.

Let us therefore look at God's word in Ephesians chapter one, beginning in verse 13. This is God's word.

"In Him you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your

salvation, having also believed you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory."

Amen, thus far this reading of God's holy word, may He add His blessing to it. Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we bow before You and ask that You would teach us of the Holy Spirit from Your word, and that by that same Holy Spirit you would open our hearts to understand, believe, embrace and live the truth about the Holy Spirit. We ask these things in Jesus name, Amen.

As we look at this part of the Creed, there are three things to consider: the person of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the significance of our profession that we "believe in the Holy Spirit." Now seminarians and Sunday School teachers, don't get nervous. I understand that's a whole semester of seminary work, and I'm not going to do that, and we will get out on time. But we can see enough highlights to reveal the outline of the scriptural affirmations about the person, the work, and what it means to possess the Holy Spirit.

I. When we say "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we are confessing that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is divine, personal and distinct; that is, He is the distinct, divine third Person of the Trinity.

Turn with me, please, to John 15. There are three significant problems today regarding the person of Christ. First, those who view the Holy Spirit as a thing, it, or force, like eastern mysticism or Star Wars, rather than a person with whom you relate. Another problem, and this is found with those who view the Holy Spirit as a thing or force, that they do not believe Him to be divine. Since He's only a force, how can He be divine? Thirdly, there is the problem of those who do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person in the one true God, the Holy Trinity. They view the Holy Spirit as a mode or as a phase, through which the one true God manifests Himself. Sometimes He manifests Himself as the Father; at other times He manifests Himself as the Son; and at other times He manifests Himself as the Holy Spirit. But when we say Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all those are simply modes or manifestations of the one true God, for there is no real Trinity of being within the one true God. Each of those three errors is prevalent today, and you would be able to find people in your neighborhood and in your community and in churches in this community that would embrace different aspects of each of those errors.

In contrast to that, when we say as Christians, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we are confessing that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is divine, personal, and distinct. He is a distinct, divine Person of the Trinity. He is the distinct, divine, third Person of the Trinity. And we can demonstrate this from the Scriptures.

First, the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a thing or a force. We could go to about 30 passages to show this, but let's look at two. In John 15:26, Jesus says to His disciples in the upper room on the night in which He was betrayed, "When the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me." Notice, first of all, the personal pronoun. Not, "I will send the Spirit and it will bear witness," but "He will bear witness of Me."

But more than that, there are personal properties that are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will come from God and He will do what? His job will be bearing witness of Jesus Christ. Now, it can't bear witness, only persons can. So Jesus is describing the work of the Holy Spirit here in terms that can only be fulfilled by a person. The Holy Spirit, in other words, will do precisely what the Father does. The Father bears witness of Christ; that's been one of the great themes of John. So also, when the Son sends the Holy Spirit, He will bear witness of Christ. It is as if He will cast a spotlight on Jesus Christ. Have you ever seen a beautiful historic building, lit at night by huge floodlights? In the same way, the Holy Spirit will turn the floodlights of God's word on the Person and work of Jesus Christ in order to illuminate them to our understanding and our faith, that we might embrace them and trust in Christ for salvation as He is offered in the gospel. The Spirit will come to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

Then turn forward to Acts 5:1. We see again in the story of Ananias and Saphira, that the Spirit is a Person, not a thing or a force, and that He is divine. "A certain man named Ananias, with his wife, Saphira, sold a piece of property and kept back some of the price for himself with his wife's full knowledge. And bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back some of the price of the land.'" You can't lie to an it. You can't lie to a force. You can't lie to a thing. You lie to a person, and notice, he says to Ananias, "You've lied to the Holy Spirit." Once again, we see the Holy Spirit as a person.

But we also see the Holy Spirit as divine. Peter continues, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God." In lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias had lied to God, and so we see from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is both personal and divine. He is a Person and He is God, He is the third Person of the blessed Trinity.

But we also see from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son. Turn back to John 15 where we started. In John 15:26, Jesus is teaching the disciples about this helper, this comforter, this paraclete, this counselor that He is going to send to be with them when He goes away, when He ascends into heaven. When He sits at the right hand of the Father, He is going to dispense this helper and as He describes this, He says, "When the helper comes

whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me.” Let me say this. If the Holy Spirit is just another name for the God who is only one and not one in three and three in one, then this verse has to read like this: “When I come, who I send, from I, I who proceed from I, I will bear witness of Me.” In other words, this verse is gobble-d-gook without the divine Trinity behind it. Without real distinction of persons within the one true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—this verse makes no sense. Jesus is saying, “I’m sending a helper; the helper is the Holy Spirit; the Spirit comes from the Father and from Me to bear witness back to Me.” That verse makes no sense unless the Holy Spirit is not simply a force, is not simply an it, is not simply one phase or manifestation of God but is in fact the third Person of the Trinity.

So, what do we learn about the person of the Holy Spirit? He is divine, He is personal, He is distinct from the Father and the Son, He is the third Person of the Holy Trinity. Now, I know that raises fifty questions in your minds. I can’t answer them all, but those things are clear from Scripture. There’s nothing hard about them. It’s hard to put them together with other things that the Scripture says, perhaps, but there’s nothing hard about those affirmations. The Holy Spirit is personal, He’s divine, He’s distinct from the Father and the Son. You’ve already started down the road to a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit’s person if you know those three things.

II. When we say “I believe in the Holy Ghost,” we are confessing that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit makes us one with Christ and is the executive of our salvation.

Now secondly, let’s look at the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s work is all over the pages of the New Testament and even the Old Testament. Did you know that the New Testament writers, for instance, say that the Holy Spirit was at work inspiring the prophets in the Old Testament? Writing the Scripture of the Old Testament? The Holy Spirit was operative in the Old Testament just as He was operative in the New Testament, but especially in the New Testament the Holy Spirit was seen assisting Jesus Christ in His ministry. At the baptism of Christ, the Spirit appears as the sign of God’s approval and anointing, but before that, it was through the Holy Spirit that He had been conceived and brought into this world of humanity and it will be through the Spirit that He will be raised again from the dead. The Holy Spirit is present throughout Jesus’ ministry leading Him in the wilderness, supporting Him in Gethsemane, enabling Him to cry, “Abba, Father!” The Holy Spirit is supporting Jesus throughout His ministry.

But especially for us in the New Testament, we see the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ and assuring us of salvation. Let me show you two examples of that. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12: 3. We learn that it is the Holy Spirit that enables the faith that unites us to Christ. How is it that we are united to Christ? We are united by faith. As we trust in Him, we are united to Him so that our sins are credited to

Him and His righteousness is credited to us and we are accepted as righteous in the beloved as we trust in Him as He is offered in the gospel.

But how do we come to believe in Jesus Christ? Some people do; some people don't. Some people believe; others reject Him. What's the difference? It is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ by faith. Look at what 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Spirit." Now Paul is not just saying that nobody can say the three-word phrase "Jesus is Lord" unless the Holy Spirit helps him. Paul is saying, however, that you cannot say that and mean it and believe it unless the Holy Spirit has done a work of grace in your heart drawing you to the Father. Remember Jesus saying, "No man comes to the Father unless He draws him." How does He draw him? Through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to say, in faith, "Jesus is Lord." The Spirit unites us to Christ.

But the Spirit also assures us. What is the fundamental struggle of every believing Christian? The nagging question from time to time, "Am I in Christ? Am I resting in Christ? Am I trusting in Christ? Has God done a work in me and drawn me to Himself because I look at myself and I look at my sin and I look at my failures and struggles and I wonder, Lord. Look at what the Apostle Paul says. Turn back to Ephesians 1:13-14, where we read, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." In other words, what is the ground of your perseverance? What is the ground of your assurance of that perseverance in faith? The biblical answer to that is that it is the Holy Spirit who is the seal. In the ancient Roman and Greek worlds, the seal was a mark of ownership. A seal on a public document indicated that it came from the emperor, or from the proconsul, or from whatever the regent was that had executed the particular decree or official paper. It was a mark that this was officially from him. It was a mark of ownership. Even the tomb of Christ was sealed by the Roman authorities so that it could not be disturbed indicating that it was under the protection of all of the plenipotentiary of Rome. And the Apostle Paul is saying that it is the Holy Spirit who is the seal of your redemption. If your perseverance were up to you, you wouldn't persevere. It's the blessed Holy Spirit at work in you who enables you to persevere.

But look at verse 14, where Paul goes on to say that the Spirit is not only a mark of ownership, He is a deposit guaranteeing your future inheritance. He is, we are told in verse 14, given as a pledge of our inheritance. In the ancient Roman and Greek worlds, a pledge was a deposit guaranteeing the full payment of a promised price. And here we are being told that your indwelling by the Holy Spirit is a deposit from God guaranteeing that He will pay the full price of your inheritance. And so it is the Spirit that works to assure us that we are in Christ,

and that we will remain in Christ, and that we will persevere to the end. And when we say, "We believe in the Holy Ghost," we are confessing that the Holy Spirit makes us one with Christ and is the executive of our salvation and is the assurer of our faith.

III. When we say "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we are confessing that we have personal fellowship with God, through Him, that we are led by Him' and that through Him we experience what it is to be sons and heirs of God.

One last thing. We've looked at the person of the Holy Spirit; we've looked at an aspect or two of the work of the Holy Spirit, but let's look briefly at what it means to profess belief in the Holy Spirit. When we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we are saying at least three things. We are saying that we are confess that we have personal fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, that we are led by the Holy Spirit, and that through the Holy Spirit we experience what it is to be sons and heirs of God. Let's think about those three things. When we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we are saying, "I believe that personal fellowship across space and time with the living Christ of the New Testament is a reality which I have found through the Holy Spirit."

In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul is telling the Ephesians what he prays for, and one of the first and greatest things that he says he prays for them is this. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family on heaven and earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..." Do you see what he's saying? By the Spirit, Christ dwells in your heart. What is the great blessing of the believer? Eternal fellowship and communion with God. God with us, God for us, and us with God. "I will be your God and you will be My people." It's the constant refrain of Scripture and the Apostle Paul is saying that by the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells in your hearts just as God dwelt in the midst of His people in His tabernacle in the midst of the wilderness. You have fellowship with God by the Holy Spirit as He roots Christ in your heart. We're confessing that we know that fellowship, that we have that fellowship by the Holy Spirit when we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

Secondly, we are saying that we are led by the Spirit. And of course, to be led by the Spirit means to be led by the Scriptures. Anytime someone wants to separate the Spirit, you better watch out, because there's some 'monkey business' about to go on. The Spirit wrote the Scriptures. To be led by the Spirit is to be led by the Scriptures that the Spirit wrote. But when we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we are saying that we are being led by the Spirit, which always means to be led by the Scriptures which He wrote. The Spirit indwells us and leads us into Christian knowledge, obedience, and service.

And isn't that the point of Galatians 5:16-26? "If we are under grace," the Apostle Paul says there, "we are led by the Spirit; we walk by the Spirit." And how do you know that you are walking by the Spirit? You bear "the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self control." That's how the Spirit's reign manifests itself; that's how you manifest that you are walking in the Spirit, that grace is reigning in righteousness in your life.

And finally, there's this. When we say that we believe in the Holy Ghost, we are blessing the Holy Spirit as the author of our assurance that we are the sons and heirs of God. What does Paul say in Romans 8:14-16? He says that it is by the Spirit that He is enabled to say, "Abba, Father." It's by the Spirit that the Father is no longer the judge that ought to condemn him, but the judge who accepts him, a sinner, into His family because of Christ. The Spirit enables us to have that view of our heavenly Father, to embrace Him as Father, to approach Him as Father. The Spirit is the bond of love between the believer and God, the guide of God's people by the Word in this world and the assurance that we are the children of God and the heirs of His grace. We believe in the Holy Spirit. The next time we confess that together, remember these things, beloved. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we bow before You blessing You for Your Spirit who indwells us, by grace, and unites us to Christ and all His benefits. We praise You for Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Guide to the Morning Service

Thoughts on the Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper

The biblical teaching on the nature of the sacraments may be epitomized as follows: God's sacraments or covenant signs/seals are "visible words" (Augustine). In them, we see with our eyes the promise of God. Indeed, in the sacraments we see, smell, touch and taste the word. In the public reading and preaching of Scripture, God addresses our mind and conscience through the hearing. In the sacraments, he uniquely addresses our mind and conscience through the other senses. In, through, and to the senses, God's promise is made tangible. A sacrament is a covenant sign and seal, which means it reminds us and assures us of a promise. That is, it points to and confirms a gracious promise of God to His people. Another way of saying it is that a sacrament is an action designed by God to sign (symbolize) and seal (ratify) a covenantal reality, accomplished by the power and grace of God, the significance of which has been communicated by the word of God, and the reality of which is received or entered into only by faith. Hence, the weakness, the frailty of human faith welcomes this gracious act of reassurance. The sacraments are by nature supplemental to and confirmatory of the promises held out in the word, and the grace conveyed by them is the same grace held out via the means of preaching. The sacraments are efficacious for the elect and the elect only, since their benefits are sanctificational

and received by faith.

The consensus of Reformed teaching on the way in which Christ is present in the Lord's Supper may be summarized as follows: there is absolutely no corporeal presence of Christ whatsoever in the Lord's Supper. The believer does not corporeally partake of Christ in the Supper. Christ is not elementally, spatially, or locally present in the Supper in any way. There is no change or conversion of the elements in the Supper. The believer does indeed receive Christ in the Supper, but not by the mouth, rather by faith. Nor does Christ's humanity come down to the believer, but by the Spirit the believer is raised in heart to receive Christ in His ascended glory.

To put it in the language of the Westminster Confession, the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper may be summarized as follows: (1) the outward elements of the Lord's Supper (bread and wine) sustain such an analogy to Christ crucified that they may truly, but only sacramentally, be called by the name of the things they represent, that is, the body and blood of Christ; nevertheless in their substance and nature they are truly and only bread and wine (see Westminster Confession 29.5). (2) Worthy recipients who outwardly partake of the visible elements of Lord Supper also inwardly by faith, really and truly, though not carnally and corporeally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of His death. (3) The body and blood of Christ are not in any way corporeally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; nevertheless Christ crucified is really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers, in the Supper, just as the elements themselves are to their outward senses (see Westminster Confession 29.7). (4) The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacrament rightly used, is not conferred by any power in the elements or ritual. (5) The efficacy of the sacrament is utterly dependent upon the work of the Spirit, in accordance with the word of covenant promise (and hence the necessity of the word of institution, which contains both the dominical precept authorizing itself and a covenant promise of benefit to worthy receivers) (see Westminster Confession 27.3).

The Lord's Supper At First Presbyterian Church, we follow the old Southern Presbyterian practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper (what some churches call "the Eucharist" or "Holy Communion") four times a year.

The Apostles' Creed

Since the Lord's Supper is for professing believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have "discerned the body of the Lord" – that is, the Church— (1 Corinthians 11:29), it is appropriate that we confess our faith together before we take it.

The Ten Commandments

By reciting the Law directly adjacent to the Gospel ordinance of the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of our need for the forgiveness of sins and the rich provision we have in Jesus Christ's perfect obedience (see Romans 5:20).

This guide to worship is written by the minister and provided to the congregation and our visitors in order (1) to assist them in their worship by explaining why we do what we do in worship and (2) to provide them background on the various elements of the service.

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