

“LIVING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT” (Creed – Part 4)
by Rom A. Pegram (10/4/20)

Good morning. As we begin this time in the word today, we'll continue to use both scripture and the Apostle's Creed as our guide to learning what being a Christian is really all about. We're going to talk about 'Living with the Holy Spirit'—that 3rd Person of the Trinity. Speaking of Jesus, the Apostles Creed says, "...who was conceived by the Holy Spirit"...

Now, *for those of you who are Christians*, you need to know that there is one thing that non-Christians don't understand about Christianity or about God ... and that's the whole idea of the Holy Spirit. And *for you non-Christians who are with us today*, you need to understand that there's one thing that Christians don't understand about Christianity or about God ... and that's the whole idea of the Holy Spirit. Ask a Christian about God or Jesus and they can usually talk with a great deal of confidence. Ask them about the Holy Spirit? That's a different story most of the time, isn't it?

So, who is the Holy Spirit? And what does the Holy Spirit do? That's where we're going today; we're going to pull back the curtain and begin to look at what God's word has to say about the whole idea of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, there's a Greek word that helps describe who the Spirit is—*Pneuma*—Greek for spirit or soul—the part of us that's alive and can live forever. So, the New Testament sometimes refers to God's Spirit as *Pneuma*—God's creative and life-giving Spirit. Even in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2) it says, "The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." That's *Pneuma*, 'around since the beginning of creation...

The Holy Spirit is also the 3rd Person of the Trinity. There's God the Father—1st Person of the Trinity, then there's God's Son, Jesus—2nd Person of the Trinity. And today, it's the 3rd Person—co-equal with the Father and the Son. And, co-equal means *the Holy Spirit is God*, not less than God, not separate from God, and has also always existed, not created. That, folks, is the 'Doctrine of the Trinity' in a nutshell ... and Trinity doesn't mean 3 Gods, just one God who exists in three persons. God exists and we experience God/relate to him in 3 different ways—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's real presence in the world and in my life. The Bible says the Holy Spirit is everywhere and at all times. In other words, God is ... *omnipresent* (like your mom when you're a teenager), because God's Spirit is everywhere! That's WHO the Holy Spirit is, but WHAT does the Holy Spirit do?

First, the Holy Spirit dwells within every Christian from the moment we surrender our lives to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is what makes possible this relationship between Jesus and us. Ephesians 1:13 says: "And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago." A lot of people think something magic happens when the Holy Spirit enters your life ... like your life, all of a sudden, becomes perfect, or you automatically stop doing wrong things, or you no longer struggle with temptations in life. But *that's just not true!* What the Holy Spirit does is ... *He gives the Christian power for living, understanding spiritual truths, and guidance in doing what's right.* But *God doesn't force anything on us.* That's why ...

Christians mess up so often. We have free will—a beautiful gift, but one we must learn to use wisely...

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, sometimes there's an immediate and observable transformation in a person's life—when they become a Christian. But, for the most part, when the Holy Spirit enters a person's life, it's just the first step in a life-long, life-changing process, where a person is daily being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. It's the beginning, not the end, of the transformation process. The Holy Spirit is God's real and active presence in the world—sent to us to make us more aware of our need for Jesus. And the presence of the Holy Spirit is also *the primary indicator that you are a child of God*. Romans 8:16 says: "For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children."

There are two primary ways that we can tell who our parents are. The first way is this: You will, more than likely, look and act like your parents. Now, for some of us, that may not be good news. We don't want to look or act like our parents sometimes, but it's true. So, the first way we know who our parents are is ... we look like them on the outside.

The second way to tell who our parents are is this: DNA. Your DNA will indicate who your parents are. So, what's inside of you, as well as the outside, matters. But it's interesting to note that it's the DNA on the inside ... that determines what you look like and how you act on the outside...

And *it's the same thing with having God as your Father*. The Holy Spirit lives within you, like your DNA, and indicates you're a child of God. And God's Spirit, WHEN ALLOWED TO, will work inside of you, and begin to make you more and more like Jesus—inside and out. That's what we're going to be exploring together today. When you become a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters your life and begins to transform you. Something happens on the inside that makes a radical difference on the outside. And the result is ... you'll never be the same again! So, *what do we need to do to allow God's Spirit to transform us into the person God wants us to be?* Galatians 5:25 says: "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." Now, it doesn't say SOME parts of our lives; it says EVERY part of our lives. Let me share with you this description of life in the Spirit and then we'll get into it (Gal. 5:22-26)...

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

So, how can I experience that kind of life? Folks, **TO LIVE A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE:**

I WILL ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONVICT ME. That doesn't sound very good, does it? What do you mean I have to allow the Holy Spirit to convict me? We're not

talking about a judge and jury kind of ‘conviction’ here; this type of *conviction* simply means ... *to be convinced of a wrong*. This is what I often refer to as the ‘nudge’ of the Holy Spirit...

John 16:8 tells us, “And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.” So, this verse says the HS does *two specific things* in my life: 1) The HS convinces me that I’ve messed up (sinned) and I’m currently separated from God ... and then... 2) The HS reminds me of how much God loves me! So, the HS both reveals the problem to me ... and reminds me of God’s solution; but how does this work?

If you have a piece of paper handy, draw *a straight line*. That’s a picture of your perfect life—always on the straight and narrow, *always doing things God’s way*—‘going on to perfection,’ as John Wesley would say...

Below that straight line, draw a squiggly line—a *very squiggly line*. That’s what our lives really look like—a life not directed by the HS. This is a person adrift ... and we’ve all been there if we’re not right now. What does this life look like? It’s a life where *a person allows their behavior to determine their beliefs*. There’s no core, no direction, no purpose. This person’s life can change on a whim; whenever their behavior changes, their beliefs change to match that. Let me give you an example, based on the Bible...

You’re a person who truly believes in God’s plan for marriage. Sexual relations outside of marriage is against your beliefs. But then you get into a relationship where you’re involved sexually—outside of marriage. Then you have a choice to make: You either change your behavior ... or you change your beliefs. And I’ll be honest, it’s a lot easier to change your beliefs than it is your behavior. Because if you’re behaving a certain way and you like it, then you just change your beliefs to say that it’s OK....

... And a lot of us live this way, where our behavior determines our beliefs, but *that’s not integrity*. (Can anyone say ‘politics’?) Listen, I understand it’s a whole lot easier to change your beliefs than your behavior. But it’s based on a life that’s empty...

Now, this is what happens when you have the Holy Spirit in your life: Instead of allowing our beliefs to change every time our behavior gets off course, *the Holy Spirit challenges us to keep our beliefs strong and to readjust our behavior to align with God’s will!* The Holy Spirit then offers us *the gift of conviction* if we allow it. When a person has a belief and the behavior changes, we have *a crisis of beliefs*; you then have to decide if you’re going to stick with your beliefs or change your beliefs. When the Holy Spirit ‘nudges,’ *that’s God giving you a chance to get it right*—to correct your behavior, to get back to living a life of integrity. But with free will, it’s an option. We can either suppress the HS or we can follow the HS. We can either lose our spiritual hearing (suppression) or receive God’s forgiveness and get back on track. Mark 1:12 shows what the HS did for Jesus: “The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness....” So, the HS convicts and compels and nudges ... when allowed. Here’s something else:

I WILL ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO COMFORT ME. In John 15:26, we hear: “But when the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengthener, Standby) comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth Who comes (proceeds) from the Father, He [Himself] will testify regarding Me.”

Another Greek word for Holy Spirit is ‘paraclete.’ *It literally means comforter or encourager.* One of the main things the HS does in our life is to comfort and encourage. So, what does that look like? Does that mean the HS will remove all obstacles and all difficulties from life? NO! Sorry...

What it means when God sends us the ‘Comforter’ is that now we don’t ever have to be alone in any situation. We don’t ever have to tough it out alone when going through hard times of life. God’s Spirit (Paraclete) will be with us during the difficult time, reminding us that God is bigger than all our problems—anything in this life we might face! God’s Spirit is always reminding us, in the midst of difficulties, that God will have our back...

Romans 8:26 says: “And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” When we’re in trouble, we pray, don’t we? But sometimes we have no clue what to say. God’s word reminds us that the HS will take care of that, too. The HS will pray for us in those times...

The HS (Paraclete) also gives us strength just when we need it—strength beyond our own. Here’s how Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus (Eph. 3:16): “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.” We need to allow the HS to comfort us, but also to give us strength when we need it most—including strength to overcome difficulties in life.

I’d mentioned earlier that God has our back. Did you know in the Greek military, they use the word ‘paraclete?’ What it means is ... the soldiers always go out in twos, so that you always have a ‘paraclete’—someone watching your back, a great description of the HS! Finally, if I desire a Spirit-filled life...

I WILL ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONTROL ME. Now, personally, I hate the sound of that word—control! Perhaps its because I’m a red-blooded American who’s used to the freedoms we all enjoy in this country ... which makes it harder for me to be part of a Kingdom (*not a democracy, but a kingdom*) ...

Folks, *there’re two things that can control your life—you OR God.* And it’s one of life’s funny paradoxes that when you try to control your own life, you kind of play God in your life; and that’s when you usually lose control. The more you try to control, the less you really have...

Paul writes about this conflict in all of us (Galatians 5:16-17): “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”

Do you remember the illustration of the person standing there with a little guy on each of their shoulders—one good and one bad? One an angel and one a devil? Do you remember that illustration (usually in cartoons)? There’s a lot of truth in that. Romans 8:5-6 is a great reminder: “Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it

in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life." A strong statement, isn't it?

According to scripture, there's a battle going on within all of us. God's Spirit wants to control all of our lives (*wants us to choose that*), but we want to stay in control, don't we? Folks hear me clearly: *Real freedom and real peace come when we give up control of ourselves to God, when we give up our right to ourselves for God and his Kingdom.* That's what Christianity is all about. You live free when it's God's Spirit motivating you and leading your life. We get into trouble when our selfish desires dig in their heels and try and control all of our actions...

I began this message today with Galatians 5:22-23—a list of the 'fruits of the Spirit'—a description of what 'living with the Holy Spirit' looks like. The Spirit, if given the opportunity, will produce in us things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. 'How are we doing on those? When we allow the Spirit control, things begin to happen. *We'll respond to situations with love instead of hate, we'll go into each workday feeling joy instead of dread, when things don't go our way, we'll be filled with peace instead of worry and fear.* And when no one's looking, you do what's right *out of faithfulness* ... instead of what is wrong *out of convenience*. These are just some of the things God wants to produce in us. The only way to see that happen is to give the HS control. Or, if you want a modern-day analogy, 'let Jesus take the wheel!' Seriously. Living with the HS can be powerful, but it can only happen if we allow the HS to convict us, to comfort & strengthen us, and to control us (with permission). *Won't you join me in praying about that?*