The Holy Spirit

October 8, 2017

By: Ben Crostreet

In Francis Chan’s book, *The* *Forgotten God*, he challenges his readers to consider the way they think about the Holy Spirit. He asks his readers to imagine growing up on a desert island, with only the Bible to read, with only the Bible to tell you of God, and to teach you about your faith in Jesus, apart from what other people might tell you, apart what you might experience in the church today.

You would probably come away from that experience convinced that the Holy Spirit is essential to the life of a Christian. You would depend on the Holy Spirit to help you through your life and your struggles, and always be looking for the Spirit to lead and guide you the way he did in the Christians of the early church. The Holy Spirit who led the early church to do incredible things for the Kingdom of God, who helped them stand up to persecution, and spread the Gospel of Jesus around the world.

But is that same experience that we have with the Holy Spirit today? Do we live by the Spirit today, as the Christians of the early church did? Francis Chan says this, “The church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.”

Can people tell from the way that you live that you are a Christian? Can they see the evidence of that in your life? I have to say that I agree with Francis Chan. We have taken this part of our lives as Christians, this incredible gift that God has given to us, and we have often ignored him in our lives today. We live by our power more than by the power of the Spirit, and we seriously cripple ourselves when we do.

People have all kinds of different ideas about who or what the Holy Spirit is, how he works in our lives, and whether he still works today like he did in the early church. Some people come from a very charismatic background, so they believe the Spirit works in certain ways that are evident in their worship of God. Others come from a much more conservative background, where the Holy Spirit is all but ignored, and they are very uncomfortable with their charismatic brothers and sisters.

The fact is, that people tend to get uncomfortable when you talk about the Holy Spirit. They will be glad to learn about the Bible, or learn how Jesus saved them from their sins, or how they can love other people. But when you start talking about how the Holy Spirit ought to be working in their lives, they begin to get uncomfortable.

Some churches might skip over this whole topic of the Holy Spirit altogether because they don’t want people to be uncomfortable. But that’s not what we are going to do, that’s not what we are all about here at Agape Christian Church. Because the Holy Spirit is as much a part of who we believe God is as Jesus himself. If we are going to be committed to knowing and learning the core values of our faith, if we are going to be committed to knowing and learning about God, then we have to include the Holy Spirit in that as well.

So this morning, we’re going to dive in and learn what we can about the Holy Spirit. But we are not going to do that by looking at what the different denominations of the church have to say about him, we aren’t going to contrast what charismatics believe, versus what conservatives believe. We’re going to do that just like we have with everything else that we have looked at so far in this series. We are going to learn what we can about the Holy Spirit through the truth of Scripture.

The first thing that we need to learn about the Holy Spirit is that he is a person. People often refer to the Spirit as ‘it’, as if it’s just a thing that God gives us to use. But Jesus tells a different story.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

John 14:16–17 ESV

See this is not about some tool or power that God has given us to use as we will. This is about a relationship that we have with the Spirit who lives in us. The word that Jesus uses to talk about the Spirit dwelling in us is the word μένω (*menō*), which means to stay, or remain, or abide. There is a sense of permanence to this word, because it’s the same word the Bible uses to talk about the permanence or eternal nature of God versus the very short lives of mankind. And yet Jesus uses that word here to talk about how the Spirit will live within us.

This is not a temporary thing, this is not an acquaintance that we see every once in a while, and politely say hello to. When the Holy Spirit dwells within us, he takes up permanent residence in us, he is there to stay, and he is there to build a relationship with us for the rest of our lives.

Second, the Holy Spirit is God. Last week we looked at the person of Jesus, and saw very clearly that he is God through what Paul and John wrote about him. We saw that Jesus was in the same form as God, the same substance and nature as God. The same thing is true of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is repeatedly called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Living God, and the Spirit of Christ throughout Scripture.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:2 ESV

So the Holy Spirit called there the Spirit of God, was present at Creation along with God the Father, and Jesus the Son. Job also speaks of the Spirit’s creative power.

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Job 33:4 ESV

Paul talks about how the Corinthians are a living example. He calls them a letter from Christ:

…written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

2 Corinthians 3:3 ESV

And in Romans 8, Paul says this:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Romans 8:9 ESV

So we have all these different names for the Holy Spirit, and they all suggest that he is God. And then we have this Scripture in Acts 5.

In the book of Acts, we have this beautiful picture of the church, sharing everything that they have, selling their possessions, their homes, their property, and then giving all the proceeds of their sales to the church so that everyone who was in need would be cared for. And in the midst of all that generosity, we have a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They sold property, then brought only a portion of the proceeds before the Apostles, which would have been fine, except they acted as though it were the full amount. They wanted to appear as righteous and generous as everyone else, while, really, they were holding back. They were lying about their giving, and Peter called them on it.

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

Acts 5:3–4 ESV

The other lessons of that story aside, what we see there is that Peter in one breath said that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit, and in the next breath called him God. When we ignore the Holy Spirit, or treat him as less than fully God, then we are treating God that way as well.

Third, the Holy Spirit is our Helper. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to be one of the disciples, knowing and following Jesus in the flesh. Think about what that would have been like, to have the Son of God, right there with you, guiding you, directing you, correcting you when you needed it, helping you through your struggles and your doubts.

What would it be like if Jesus himself were standing beside you, helping you every day, guiding you in your life and in your choices. Maybe for some of you that sounds amazing, and you would jump at the chance to have Jesus right here with you. Maybe for others, that sounds completely intimidating and scary. But Jesus promised us something better than even having him leading us and guiding us in person. When Jesus foretold his death in John 14, he sought to give comfort and peace to his disciples by telling them about ‘another Helper’ or ‘another Counselor’ who was coming.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

John 14:16 ESV

The Greek word for ‘another’ is a word that means one that is just like the first, and it also means there are only two of a kind. So the Holy Spirit is just like Jesus in many ways, able to help and guide us just like Jesus did for the disciples. And in John 16, Jesus said it would be to the advantage of the disciples if he left, it would be better that they have the Holy Spirit than to even have Jesus himself standing beside 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

Here’s the point: Jesus is not physically standing here with us. We might think that Jesus being with us would be amazing, and it would, but we have something that Jesus said would be even better than that. We have God’s Spirit, living and active, inside of us, leading and guiding us as we face the struggles of our lives. His Spirit is dwelling within every one of us who has put our faith in him.

That’s what makes it so ironic and so sad that we talk so little about the Holy Spirit, since he has such a huge impact on our lives. The Holy Spirit plays a huge role in the way that we live our lives, the way that we overcome sin, and the way that we follow Jesus. The word that Jesus used for the Spirit there in John 14 gives us a good idea of what the Spirit really does for us. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Helper.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

John 14:16 ESV

Jesus also used the same word to describe the Holy Spirt in John 15 and 16. The word he uses is the Greek word παράκλητος (*paraklētos*). But outside of Scripture, in the secular realm, this word meant a legal advocate, someone who would stand up for you in a courtroom setting, who was on your side no matter what. In fact, this same word is used in:

… if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1 ESV

In that verse Jesus stands up for us as our advocate before God. And the Holy Spirit does the same thing . This word παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) is not always used in a legal sense though, it can also mean counselor, encourager, mediator, or comforter. The idea behind this is that the Holy Spirit is the one who is there with us all the time to guide us, protect us, advocate for us, and give us whatever we need to be successful in following after Jesus. So let’s look at some of the things the Holy Spirit does for us and in us.

First, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us.

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. 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

Have you ever felt that you should pray about something, but you didn’t have the words to articulate what was going on in your heart, you didn’t know what to say? When we don’t know how to pray, we can have confidence in the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is within us, he knows the will of God, and knows our hearts, and he is interceding on our behalf. He is our advocate when we need him the most.

Second, the Holy Spirit also helps us speak when we are in tough situations.

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:11 ESV

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Luke 12:11–12 ESV

These verses speak about what we are to say when we are persecuted. When we are standing before those who would like to see us and our faith go away, how will we respond?

Jesus tells us that the Gospel must be proclaimed even in those situations. But we don’t have to be clever enough, or eloquent enough to make that happen. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will give us the words that we need when the time comes.

As a preacher, I can tell you with all confidence that this happens at other times as well. There have been countless times when I have been writing a sermon, and the words just start to flow. I might write hundreds of words in the space of a few minutes. And then I read back over what I have just written, and I realize, that doesn’t sound like me at all. That it’s not something that I would normally say, maybe it’s not a topic I would normally broach. But almost every time it is exactly what needs to be said. Those words during those moments don’t come from me, they come from the Holy Spirit.

But a word of caution: just because Jesus has promised that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say when we need it does not mean we should not prepare for those moments. There are a lot of preachers who do no preparation at all, they simply get up and rely on the Holy Spirit to do the speaking for them. My preaching professor at Lincoln once said, they might let the Spirit lead them for 30 minutes on a Sunday morning, but why not start letting him lead you on Monday morning and continue all week long.

The Spirit helps us in our preparation as well as in the moment. And that doesn’t just apply to preaching, that applies to everyday situations as well. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will help to teach us, he will help us remember what we have learned, and then he will give us the words to say when the time comes. But there is no reason to think that the Holy Spirit will give us words to say and give us understanding of things that we have never put time and effort and preparation into. So don’t use the Holy Spirit as an excuse not to study your Bibles. But if you do, you can be confident that he will bring the right Scriptures to your mind, and the right words to your mouth when you need to speak up for the Gospel

Third, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2 ESV

Jesus want us to come to him just as we are, with all the stains and blemishes we bear. But after we put our faith in him, the Holy Spirit begins to work on our hearts from there. He changes our hearts to be more like his. Max Lucado says it like this, ““God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.” Paul says it like this:

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV

God is continually transforming us to become more and more like Jesus. He does that in us through the work of the Holy Spirit who combats sin in our lives, and frees us from sins that no amount of willpower could free us from. This is a lifelong partnership with the Holy Spirit that we enter into when we first come to faith in Christ, and we are continually transformed to become more like Jesus.

Number four, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

John 16:8 ESV

Sometimes Christians think it is their job to convict other people of sin. Often times they take to Facebook to do that, because Facebook convinces everyone of the truth. Sometimes we try to do that with legislation, or protests, or other ways.

In reality, it’s not our job to convict the world of sin. That’s not even my job, or Rod’s job as ministers. Our job as Christians is simply to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and to make more disciples of his. Sometimes we need to stop trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit, and just allow him to work in lives and hearts of people as he will.

Number five, the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7 ESV

The word Paul uses there for ‘each’ is a word that means every single one. That means that all believers have a gift they can use for building up their brothers and sisters in Christ, whether you have ever developed that gift or not.

We could talk for days about how those gifts work, and whether certain spiritual gifts are still given to believers today, and there would probably be disagreements among us about how those things work in our lives today.

But for today, just know that every believer is given these gifts by the Spirit, and they are all necessary to the life of the church. If you aren’t using your spiritual gifts for the good of others, for building up and encouraging others, then your brothers and sisters are missing a part of the body that they desperately need, and this is part of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And finally, the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives. There are a lot of Scriptures that talk about bearing fruit for God in our lives. In John 15, Jesus says that in order to bear fruit, we have to be connected to him as the true vine. In Colossians 1, Paul prays that the Colossians might bear fruit in every good work, and increase in the knowledge of God. If the idea of fruit is confusing for you, in Colossians 1, the New Living Translation talks about ‘bearing fruit and changing lives’, that’s what Paul is talking about there. And then in Galatians 5, Paul tells us what that fruit looks like, what that change looks like, and where it comes from.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22–23 ESV

These are things that we cannot do unless we have the help of the Holy Spirit. You will not produce love, joy, peace, patience, or any of the other fruits of the Spirit in your own life and heart by yourself and your own willpower. Those are changes of the heart, and we cannot do that without the help of the Spirit of God. We cannot change our hearts on our own.

That’s why the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to us in our faith. The church becomes completely irrelevant when it is void of the Spirit of God, when it is purely of human invention. We cannot do what Christ called us to do when we do not live in the Spirit. We cannot become more like Christ without the Spirit. And no matter how much effort, or willpower, or money we throw at it, we will never produce fruit by our efforts alone. That is something that the Spirit alone can do.

We have this incredible, beautiful gift from God, that he allowed his Spirit to dwell within us, to always be there to help and guide us, to change our hearts and our lives so that we look more and more like Christ all the time.

The amazing thing is that we have something that no one in the Old Testament had. We have the permanent indwelling of the Spirit of God. The people of the Old Testament had occasions where the Spirit of God came on a person here or there throughout history, but it was never permanent. We who believe in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us not for a brief period of time, not once in a lifetime, but permanently. This is not a one-time act, it is a lifelong relationship with the living and active Spirit of God. It is not limited to the first time we met Christ, or a few times throughout our life. It is a day by day, moment by moment interaction with the Holy Spirit

Our journey as disciples of Jesus may not be easy, in fact I guarantee that it won’t be, and I can say that because Jesus said it first. But even though our path is not easy, we have the greatest Helper we could ever ask for. We have the Spirit of the Living God dwelling within us, and who could ask for more than that?