



The Westminster Pulpit

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“That’s the Spirit”

Sermon Series on the Heidelberg Catechism Galatians 5:16-26

Donovan A. Drake

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We continue our series that is loosely based on the Heidelberg Catechism. The question for today is: “What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?” Our New Testament reading comes from Paul’s letter to the *Galatians 5:16-26*. Hear the Word of God.

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?

When I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of the Spirit of God sweeping over the waters of creation. While I wasn’t there in the beginning, I have some faint recollection as to seeing some ripple and wave sweeping across the water, and that’s the Spirit.

When I think of the Spirit, I think of Moses who led God’s people out of the land of bondage, through the Red Sea and smack into the wilderness, where the people complained. Moses complained to God. “Did I conceive all these people? Did I birth these people? These people who complain and say, ‘Give us meat to eat.’ Lord if this is the way you’re going to treat me, just kill me now.” So the Lord said, “Holy Moses! You’re stressed! Why don’t you gather some 70 elders and I’ll take the Spirit I gave to you and give them some of it so as to relieve your burden? So, you won’t have to carry it all yourself.” (*Number 11*)

When I think of the Spirit, I think of King David after he watched that beautiful woman taking a bath, after he committed adultery, after he had her husband murdered at the front, after he had been caught, I can hear David saying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me." (*Psalm 51: 10-11*)

I think of Mary and the angel who said, "Greetings favored one! You will bear a son of the most high God." Mary said, "How can this be?" And the angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Power of the most high will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy." (*Luke 2:35*) I think of the baptism of Jesus and the skies being ripped apart and the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove. I probably would have missed it, if the Gospel writer hadn't pointed it out to me. And that's the Spirit. I think of the Spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. I think of Jesus unwrapping the scroll in the synagogue and saying the old words of the Prophet. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free..." (*Luke 4:18*)

When I think of the Spirit, I think of resurrected Jesus coming to scared disciples hiding behind locked doors and Jesus breathed the Spirit upon them. It was so quiet. I think of the wind and the tongues of fire on that day of Pentecost. It was so loud. I think of poor Philip being snatched away by the Spirit to the desert to go baptize an Ethiopian Eunuch. Are you kidding me? Fortunately, in the desert there is no water, but then the Ethiopian Eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. What is to prohibit me from being baptized?" And Philip baptized an Ethiopian Eunuch. (*See Acts 8*) Imagine telling the church you just got another new member. "Who is it? A banker? A CEO? We need some money in the Church." "No, an Ethiopian Eunuch." The Church just got a little more diverse. But, that's the Spirit.

I think of Ananias being told to lay his hands upon that man named Saul. "Look Lord, I know about this guy. He's evil." And the Lord said, "That evil man is the instrument of my choosing. Lay your hands upon him so that he may regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (*See Acts 9*) And Ananias baptized that man named Paul. When I think about the Spirit I think of Paul who wrote, "Live by the Spirit and not the flesh."

I think of my Aunt Carol living by the Spirit. The Drake family that has done things decently and in order since the beginning of time had some sort of genetic mutation that caused my Aunt Carol to join a Pentecostal church. I attended her church once when I was in the 7th grade, and it scared me to death. Her church was all about the Spirit and people speaking in tongues and laying hands on one another. They were clapping during the hymns, and they were clapping on time and in rhythm. Something hardly ever heard or seen in the Presbyterian Church. I saw how they all smiled and laughed and hugged. I thought, "Now that's really something." That's the Spirit. It is something that was foreign to me.

I would like to find some of the Spirit. This summer I went with a member of this congregation, John Bailey, to a conference in New Mexico for spiritual seekers. I know

that some of you may need some time to digest that. Stranger things have happened. Not much stranger, but stranger things have happened.

It was a great conference. I learned a lot, but one of the moments at the conference that caught my attention was when I had to leave that great conference room filled with 2,000 people to head up to my hotel room to pick up my name tag. I was waiting for the elevator and a woman, maybe 60 years old, was also there waiting. She worked at the hotel; I believe she was the person who checked on what rooms were cleaned or needed to be cleaned. There she was, about five foot four. There was something about her, she had a charisma and she wasn't even saying much of anything. I wish I could explain to you the experience. We exchanged some pleasantries, maybe talked about the weather. She just exuded this brilliance of grace, love and hospitality. When the elevator door opened, I said, "After you." She said, "Really!" It was as if I had just bought her a new car.

In the elevator, there was a custodian from the hotel leaning on a short ladder. She spoke to him for a bit in a language I didn't understand, and with the same brilliance and grace. I was absolutely captivated. When she got off the elevator about three floors up, I glanced at the custodian, and he was radiating from the encounter. It was as if we had both seen God.

I even wrote the hotel when I got back Nashville. I said, "I didn't know her name, but when I got off the elevator, I was a better person than before I got on." Is that strange to acknowledge that? I have no understanding as to whether she was a practicing Christian or wasn't even a Christian at all, but I would say that some Holy Spirit was just pouring out of that woman.

When I think of the Spirit, I think of it as something powerful, mysterious, and amazing; something that was in the Bible long ago. I think of it as something that some congregations really seem to want to catch. I think of some people being very spiritual. I think of it as elusive. But yet, in The Book of Confessions, it is the The Heidelberg Catechism that says, "What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?" It's God! Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the eternal God. But then the confession says, "I believe that the Holy Spirit is also given to me." Isn't that interesting! "I believe that the Holy Spirit is also given to me." Why don't we say these words together? "I believe the Holy Spirit is given to me." How does that make you feel? Have you ever thought of yourself as having the Holy Spirit given to you? Let's say it again. "I believe the Holy Spirit is given to me." That's amazing! We all said it. Do you believe it? Do you believe it for yourself? Do you believe it for the one seated next to you? Did any of you say to someone, "Honey, you can remain silent. Lord knows you don't have the Spirit of God."?

No. Everyone in here just said those words. Do you believe it?

If you don't, I can understand. I think most of us are wired to think we are in control. We begin our days with the question, "What I am going to do with my day?" Answer: "Whatever I want." No Spirit! But, the real answer is: "The Holy Spirit is given even to me." Well, where is it? How do I tap into it? Where is the evidence?

Paul says that the Spirit produces a harvest - a harvest of love, joy, generosity, faithfulness, kindness, patience, and self-control. Does your life possess the evidence? I don't think it works like this. I have no biblical support, but sometimes I wonder what happens when we die. What if it is that we travel to those pearly gates and there is Saint Peter holding the keys to the kingdom, and there you stand and say, "I really thought all this pearly gate stuff was a metaphor. I didn't think you'd actually be here." And St. Peter says, "Most people say that."

Suddenly seeing that it is true, I would think your whole life would pass before your eyes. And you might say, "Well, Mr. Peter or Mr. Saint, Mr. Saint Peter, I guess I wouldn't mind going back and living my life all over again. I didn't realize that..." And Saint Peter says, "Hold on. Let's go over your resume for a moment." And then he takes out a big stack of papers. And Peter says, "I see you built twelve Habitat Houses." "What? I didn't build 12 habitat houses. Have you got my name straight?" "I've got it straight. I've been doing this since before you were born. It says right here you did. It says each week you put \$100 dollars in the plate at church." "That's \$5,200 dollars a year. And out of that \$5,200 a year a portion of that money went to a Habitat House. You actually purchased 10 shower heads." "I did? That's nothing to crow about." St. Peter comes back to say, "Have you ever taken a shower without a shower head? It's something."

St. Peter looks down at the resume and says, "I see your prayers for your friend who was suffering." "Are those in there?" "Yes. I see that you showed up at a memorial service for your friend and the words you spoke to the widower, he just thinks about those words almost every day." You say, "I don't remember that." "It says here, you offered a can of Fix-a-Flat to a woman who had a flat tire at the children's hospital on October 3rd, 1990." "I don't remember that at all." "Well, she was so inspired by your generosity that she turned around and gave that old car to her neighbor's son who needed a vehicle to get to work." You say, "Now, that's generous." "You inspired it."

"It says here in this file, 357 people are so thankful for the joy you brought to their lives. Apparently, you're really good at remembering birthdays." "Well. I don't..." "It says here you smiled at someone on an elevator and it changed their day." "Come on that's nothing." "If you asked him, it was really something. Made him believe in the Spirit of God." "Well," you say to St. Peter "I don't think that's enough." "What do you mean? You don't think you did enough? What do you mean?" "I don't think I'm worthy to enter into the Kingdom of God." And St. Peter says, "Don't you remember the words from the catechism of your youth? That I am not my own, but I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." (*Question 1*)

"So that's true?" "It's true." "Well, then I think I would have been more grateful. I think if I knew what the harvest was all about, I would have planted that Spirit everywhere." And St. Peter looks you in the eyes and says, "You know, everyone says that."