

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #26, Lord's Day 20

Faith in God the Holy Spirit



The John Knox Institute
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Sermon #26, Lord's Day 20

Faith in God the Holy Spirit

John 16, verse 13

Question and Answer #53

i. Introduction and Review

- 1. The Person of the Holy Spirit**
- 2. The Gift of the Holy Spirit**
- 3. The Work of the Holy Spirit**

Introduction and Review

Congregation, some time ago, when we considered Lord's Day 8, the question was asked, in Question #24, *How are these articles divided?*—referring, of course, to the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed. And the Answer was: *Into three parts; the first is of God the Father and our creation; the second, of God the Son and our redemption; the third, of God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification*—setting before us the unique role that each Person in the Trinity has, the unique biblical emphasis upon each Person: the Father and creation, the Son and redemption, the Holy Spirit and sanctification. And then, in Lord's Days 9 and 10, we have focused on God the Father. And then in Lord's Days 11 through 19, we have focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, we focused on God the Son and our redemption.

And that brings us now to Lord's Day 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism. And if you open your Psalter books, you will see that it boldly says above that Lord's Day, "Of God the Holy Ghost." And initially, it appears as if one very short Lord's Day, the shortest Lord's Day in the entire Catechism, is devoted to the Holy Ghost. But most commentators correctly indicate that, even though Lord's Day 20 only speaks specifically of the Holy Ghost, the ones that follow—21, 22, 23, and 24—all deal with the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So let's read Lord's Day 20

of the Catechism.

Question #53: *What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?*

The Answer: *First, that He is true and coeternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.*

And so, there are three things that we want to focus on, with God's help, in this evening hour, as we consider what it means to believe in God the Holy Spirit, in God the Holy Ghost. First of all, we will focus on *the Person of the Holy Spirit*, especially since it says here, *He is true and coeternal God with*—together with, in union with, in full cooperation with—*the Father and the Son*. And so, our focus will not necessarily be on the divinity of that third Person. We dealt with that before. But the focus will especially be on his unique relationship to the Father and the Son, and how that works its way out in his work in being the accomplisher of redemption; being the sanctifier; the one who brings to pass in the lives of sinners what the Father has purposed, and what the Son has accomplished by his redeeming work—so the Person of the Holy Spirit in his special relationship to the Father and to the Son. Secondly, *the Gift of the Holy Spirit*, because it says here so simply, and yet so beautifully: *That He*—his glorious Person—*that He is also given me*. I want you to notice in this short Answer how very personal, again, this Answer is, how the word “me” occurs several times. And so, you see again how the Catechism clearly talks about the Holy Spirit in terms of what this means for the believer. What does this mean for me? So, the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and then *the Work of the Holy Spirit, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.*

The Person of the Holy Spirit; The Gift of the Holy Spirit; and The Work of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Person of the Holy Spirit

Congregation, it's remarkable that the Holy Spirit—I'm sure I mentioned it before—is the very first Person mentioned by name in Scripture. In Genesis 1, verse 2, the second verse of the Bible, we read this: “And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” And the word there is, he was brooding over the face of the waters. And then, that Spirit comes in action. And so, the Bible immediately begins with a Triune God. It is the Father, who speaks by his Son. Because in the beginning was the Word, and as the Father speaks by his Son, the Spirit who is hovering, who is brooding over the waters, that Spirit comes in action and carries out the work of the Father and the Son. That's why the Holy Spirit has been called, “The Executive of the Trinity.” In other words, all that the Father has purposed, all that he's accomplished by his Son, all that the Son does, they all do it by the Spirit. So, wherever there's divine activity, wherever God carries out his purposes, it is always by means of the Person of the Spirit.

And that's why the Spirit is set before us in Scripture correctly as the origin, and as the fountain of all life. Oh, what an amazing moment that must have been at the dawn of history, when the Father speaks through his Son, and that Spirit begins to move, and the marvelous work of creation unfolds itself. And, of course, that reached its zenith when God made man. Boys and girls, you, no doubt, have read that story many times, and your parents have read it, the very special way in which God made Adam. He formed him from the dust of the earth, and then we read that God breathed his breath into Adam, and Adam became a living soul. The word “spirit” is from Latin, which literally means “breath.” And so, the Spirit is sometimes referred to in Scripture as “The breath of the Almighty”. And so God breathed his breath into Adam, and he became a living soul.

And so, Adam, as he stood there, as God's masterpiece, there he stood. He was the son of his Father. He bore the image of God's Son, and he was the temple of the Holy Spirit; so remarkable was God's relationship with his creature; so intimate was that relationship with his creature that by his Spirit, he dwelt within man, a temple of the Holy Ghost.

But when Adam and Eve fell, all of that changed. And so Adam and Eve, and every sinner thereafter are now born at the synagogues of Satan. And the amazing thing is that as the result of the redeeming work of God, that same Spirit transforms fallen sinners into temples of the Holy Ghost. And so, that's why, in Lord's Day 8, the work of sanctification is attached to the name of the Holy Spirit. So, let's just talk about that for a moment. What does that mean "to sanctify"? It's, again, derived from the Latin. It literally means "to make holy." It means "to fully conform to the very character of God, because God is a holy God. And God created man to be a holy creature. As a result of sin, we have become unholy creatures. But when the Spirit, who is the giver and author of life, when he makes the sinner alive, it is that Spirit, then, who begins to so work in that human being, that that human being becomes a holy creature again.

Another way we could define the work of sanctification is that it is the Spirit's work to make sure that whatever God does, and whatever God purposes, and whatever God makes will ultimately fulfill the very purpose for which he made it. And so, this was the Spirit who, therefore, as I said, was the Executive of the Trinity. Even at the dawn of creation, he was the one who carried out the plan of God, the plan of a Triune God. He was the one that saw to it that everything in creation fulfilled the exact purpose for which it was made.

That's why the fall of man was so very, very dreadful. That's why it is so marvelous that that same Spirit now works mightily and irresistibly in the hearts of fallen sinners. Not only does he make us alive spiritually—we'll go back to that in a moment—not only does he again make us into a temple of the Holy Spirit, but his work is that through his indwelling ministry, ultimately, a fallen human being will again begin to function as God originally created us to be. And so, he is the great Sanctifier, he is the great Completer, he is the great Completer of all of the work of God. And in that sense, his work will not be finished until there be a new heaven and a new earth. When the Father saw all of his work in creation, he was very pleased, very pleased, and he saw that it was very good. When the Lord Jesus finished his work of redemption, he could cry out, "It is finished!" But the Holy Spirit's work is not yet finished. It will not be finished until there will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness will dwell.

And in order for us to understand how that Spirit works in the hearts and souls of sinners, we need to focus briefly on his unique role within the Trinity, because that's the focus of Lord's Day 20. And congregation, I will try to explain it as clearly as I can, because I realize we are dealing with an extraordinary mystery. Because the Trinity is, after all, a mystery. And yet, what has been revealed about that Trinity gives us insight into the very special place that the Holy Spirit has within the Trinity itself.

And so, I want to again emphasize that the Trinity is the everlasting love relationship between the Father and the Son. And they love each other in the very Person of the Holy Spirit. That's why only of the Holy Spirit do we read that he proceeds from the Father, and he proceeds from the Son. Those characteristics do not apply to either the Father or the Son. And, again, this matches his name. Because, congregation, that means that, in the Spirit, the Father and the Son live in perfect fellowship and communion with each other. That means that the Holy Spirit is that personal bond of love that unites the Father and the Son. The Father, in the Spirit, fully communicates himself to his Son; and the Son, in the Spirit, fully communicates himself to the Father. In the Spirit, the

Father knows his Son exhaustively; and in the Spirit, the Son knows the Father exhaustively.

And why is this so important? Because, congregation, as we will see in a moment, when we talk about the work of the Holy Spirit, the way he works the work of salvation, the way he carries out and accomplishes the work of redemption, matches with how he functions within the Holy Trinity.

And yet, when Christ speaks about this love relationship between himself and his Father, he doesn't mention the Spirit. Let me read to you Matthew 11, verse 27, it says: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." And so, there, Christ, as it were, lifts the veil, and allows us for a moment to have a glimpse of what transpires within God's glorious Triune being. He's saying there, only the Father really knows the Son, and only the Son really knows the Father. And why is the Spirit not mentioned? Well, the late theologian, J. I. Packer¹—some of you may know him. He has written a wonderful book called, *Knowing God*. If you've not read that book, I would highly recommend it to you, *Knowing God*. But he calls the Holy Spirit "The Shy Sovereign." And the reason he does that is because he says, the Holy Spirit is always in the background. The Holy Spirit never draws attention to himself, because the work of the Holy Spirit is to draw attention to both the Father and the Son, you see. That belongs to his very Person, as the one who proceeds from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father. His entire work, as we read from John 16, Jesus said, "He will not speak of himself. He will not draw attention to himself." His work is to glorify both the Father and the Son, and it's with a special focus on the Son, as we will see later. Because that's the Father's delight. The Father's delight is that the focus would be on his Son, because, as the Son is glorified, so will the Father be glorified. So it is the Spirit, therefore, who alone, who alone can grant us a proper knowledge of both the Father and the Son, because he alone knows the Father and the Son. Let me read again what we read from 1 Corinthians 2, verse 10: "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" And what Paul simply means is that no one knows you the way you know yourself. And other people will only know something about you if you choose to reveal something of yourself. And then he applies this, of course, he says, "Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (verses 10 and 11). Because he proceeds from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father, he knows with an infinite knowledge the heart of the Father and the heart of the Son. He is the full revelation of it. He is the full embodiment of it. That's why the Spirit is a Person, is genuine divine Person in the full sense of the word. *He is true and coeternal God*, it says here, *with*, together with, in harmony *with the Father* and *with the Son*.

That's why this explains to us, when, in John 14, verse 23, when Jesus says, "We will come unto him"—to the sinner; and he's talking about himself and his Father—"We will come unto him. and make our abode with him." Now Christ does not mention the Spirit there, but we know, how does it happen? How do the Father and the Son abide in the heart of the believer?—in the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 1, verse 3, the opening chapter of 1 John, John writes: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Again, he does not mention the Spirit, because that's implied, you see. In other words, our fellowship—also in believers—our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, but always in the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, the bond of love that unites the Father and his Son; the Person in whom

¹ James Innell Packer, aka J. I. Packer (1926–2020), was an English-born Canadian evangelical theologian, cleric, and author in the low-church Anglican and Calvinist traditions, having been considered as one of the most influential evangelicals in North America, best known for his book, *Knowing God*.

the Father and his Son exist in everlasting fellowship and communion. That Spirit who knows the Father and the Son from the inside out, and is able, therefore, to make them known to us. But in all of his work, in all of his work, he aims for the glory of both the Father and of the Son.

2. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

But then, it says so beautifully that, *Secondly*,—this glorious Person, this glorious Holy Spirit—*He is also given [to] me*—to me, a sinner. Congregation, what a very precious statement that is! Because what a gift that is! What a gift it is, when that Spirit is granted unto me. And dear believer, if that had not happened in your life, you would still be dead in trespasses and sins. Oh, the grace and the mercy of God, that God has seen fit to give his Spirit even to you. We who are, by nature, hostile to God, hostile to his Word; we who, by nature, have no use for God; oh, that sovereign moment when God comes and takes hold of an enemy, when God comes and takes hold of a rebellious and unbelieving sinner, and by his Spirit, transforms that sinner into a man or woman that begins to love and to fear God. Oh, he is also given to me—given to me, in order to make me again what God intended us to be in Adam. That’s the purpose why that Spirit is given unto us, given to us in order to restore us to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. Because, dear believer, that’s what you are. That’s what that Spirit has accomplished. He has transformed you into his dwelling place.

And I agree with one author who said, “How shamefully we forget that.” How shamefully, even as believers, we ignore that Holy resident. How often we grieve that Holy resident that dwells within us. And how amazing it is that, when that Spirit has been given to us, that God will never withdraw that gift. And even though, shamefully, as believers, we still often grieve that Spirit by our foolishness, by our sinfulness, by yielding to our flesh, yet that Spirit will never withdraw himself ever. He’s a Holy Spirit, and therefore, very, extremely sensitive to sin. And one of the things that he wants to accomplish in your heart and soul is to make you, as a believer, hypersensitive to sin. And so, therefore, that same Spirit, there will be those blessed times, when we experience his power, his sweetness, his presence, his enabling grace. But when we sin, when we depart, and we grieve him, he will withdraw his gracious influence, not his gracious presence, but he will withdraw his gracious influence. And he does that as an act of love. He wants to teach you, dear child of God, he wants to teach you what a bitter thing it is to sin. Because he wants, as I’ve said before, he wants you to become hypersensitive to sin. Because that Holy Spirit who dwells within you has as a goal to make you a holy man and to make you a holy woman; to sanctify you, and to conform you to the image of Christ.

That’s why the Bible speaks of that Spirit as God’s seal. Let me just read two passages to you. Second Corinthians 1, verse 22: “[God] hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14: “In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.” What a precious truth that is, that not only is the Spirit given to every believer, but his very presence seals your redemption, congregation. He is given to us as a seal.

In the history also of the Reformed faith, volumes have been written about the sealing work of the Holy Spirit, and some have presented it as if this is a rare privilege that very, very few believers ever experience, to be sealed with the Spirit. I was so impressed when I heard a presentation that at the end of his life, John Owen,² the great theologian of Puritanism, came to the simply conclusion,

² John Owen (1616–1683, was an English Puritan Nonconformist church leader, theologian, and vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford. One of the most prominent theologians in England during his lifetime, Owen was a prolific author and poet, still widely read by Reformed Christians today, and is known for his writings on sin.

and he said, “I conclude, that all of God’s children are sealed by the Holy Spirit”—all of them, sealed by his indwelling, his irreversible indwelling. And that’s why, when we think of the Holy Spirit, he is as precious a gift as Christ. We speak of Christ as God’s unspeakable gift, as God’s inexpressible gift. What Paul is simply saying, the gift of God’s Son is so extraordinary that we cannot find the words to describe adequately what it means for that Christ to be my portion: “the unspeakable gift of God.” And that’s equally true of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also God’s unspeakable gift to us.

So when that Spirit was poured out—he was, of course, active in the Old Testament—but in a very unique sense, he was poured out on the day of Pentecost. And where did that Spirit come from? He came from the very heart of God. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was ultimately the outpouring of the heart of a Triune God.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit

And that brings us to the remarkable work of that Spirit, in line of what I’ve just said. And so, it says very simply and beautifully here, so, for what purpose has he been given to me? *To make me*—again, very personal—*to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits.* That’s his work. That’s his work, dear believer, in your life. The very reason he regenerated you, he quickened you; the very reason he united you to the Lord Jesus Christ; and by that sovereign act, why he established that vital union is that you would become a partaker of Christ and all his benefits. I want you to notice how that’s stated here—not the partaker of Christ’s benefits, and Christ; no, partakers of Christ, the Person of Christ, and all his benefits—always in that order in Scripture.

And so, yes, as believers, we therefore reap the rich benefits of who Christ is, the rich benefits of all that he’s accomplished. But ultimately, congregation, it’s about Christ. We become partakers of Christ. In regeneration, we are united to Christ. It is Christ who is the very embodiment of our salvation. And out of that union, flow many wonderful benefits. And why do I emphasize that? Well, there are many today also in evangelical Christianity, who are interested in the benefits, but not in the Christ of the benefits. They want to be saved because they don’t want to go to hell; they want to go to heaven. They’re just interested in the benefits, rather than the benefactor. But the Holy Spirit, in true conversion, in working the marvelous work of regeneration; in that sovereign moment, when he makes us alive, he unites us to Christ. He unites us to Christ with an unbreakable union. And so, from that moment on forward, there is a living relationship through the Holy Spirit with Christ and that sinner. Oh, what a marvelous moment that is.

That’s why, once that union is established by the Holy Spirit, the life of the regenerated soul, that life flows out of Christ. Christ becomes the source of that spiritual life. Christ is the vine, and the Spirit has grafted us, grafted you, believer, grafted you into that vine. And his life now begins to flow in you. His life now begins to function in you. And that’s why it is the nature of that life to be directed towards Christ. The life that flows out of Christ will always be drawn to Christ, will always gravitate towards Christ, will always be focused on Christ. That’s the point I tried to make this morning, expounding John 6, verse 45: “Every man...that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father.” And I pointed out to you that those two verbs clearly refers to that sovereign snapshot, that sovereign moment when God opens up deaf ears, when he changes our will, by his Spirit. What is the result of it? What is the result of hearing and learning is we cannot but come to Christ. So the life that flows out of Christ is attracted to Christ, is drawn to Christ.

That’s why believers are described as those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; those

for whom this Christ is precious, and is altogether lovely. It is the undeniable and infallible evidence of regeneration. So that means, that in regeneration, the Spirit transforms us from an unbeliever into a believer. And that's why it is faith in Christ, it is this coming to Christ that we spoke of this morning, which is the only reliable biblical evidence that regeneration has taken place. All religious experience, whatever it may be, no matter how many tears we may weep, no matter how much we may groan, if all of that does not bring us to Christ, it's not the work of the Holy Spirit, not his saving work. His saving work is always focused on Christ. He makes me, "by a true faith." Often the Catechism uses that word "true", because there also is a counterfeit faith, which is not the real thing. But by a true faith, by a true, living union to Christ, he makes me a *partaker of Christ and [of] all His benefits*. And once he does that mighty work, then the indwelling Holy Spirit exercises that new life; he exercises that new principle. And he works within the believer to make us grow in the knowledge of the Christ to whom we are united, at that moment, at that sovereign moment when he regenerates—and that's a mystery of when and how that happens. Initially, we may not yet know Christ, but the immediate work of the Holy Spirit is to so work in our hearts to drive us to that Christ.

And so, he will make "room" for Christ. Some people don't like that expression. But I think it's a very valid expression, because, by nature, there is no room for Christ in our hearts at all. But that Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, that Spirit who accomplishes that marvelous work, who makes me a partaker of Christ; that Spirit will so work in us experientially that we realize that we need this Christ. So, in regeneration, from God's side, we are united to Christ the moment it happens, we are united to Christ. But experientially, we have to come to the embrace of Christ. But again, let me emphasize, when the Spirit accomplishes the one, when he cuts us off from Adam, and he grafts us into Christ, he will never fail experientially to make room for Christ, and to draw us to that Christ, so that by faith, we will embrace him, and come to a conscious and saving knowledge, to the Christ through whom we are united.

And oh, that Spirit of Christ, therefore, works restlessly within the believer, restlessly to cause us to grow in the grace and knowledge of that Christ. Because the Spirit has but one overarching desire, and that is to glorify Him also in the lives of his children. That's why Jesus said, "When the Spirit comes, he will lead you into all the truth, the truth concerning himself. He's the one who will take out of me, out of my fulness, and he will show it unto you. He will teach you what it means to be in me, to be a partaker of me, and of all my benefits." And so, it is the desire of that Spirit, congregation, it is his desire that his children fully grasp what that means to be united to Christ, and to be united to all of his benefits.

And so, it is that Spirit who works restlessly in the heart of the believer, to lead us to a believing appropriation, that we experientially appropriate who Christ is and what he has accomplished. That's the experiential side of it all. Now remember, let me emphasize again, from God's side, the matter is settled the moment we are regenerated, the moment we are united to Christ, our relationship with God in Christ is forever settled. But we also need to come to that understanding experientially, which is what the Spirit of Christ does.

Then it goes on to say here, *That He may comfort me*. Again, that's very, very precious. So that tells us what is his goal, what is his overarching goal in making us partakers in Christ and of all his benefits? His overarching goal is that we would experience the joy of that salvation. That's why Jesus said: "These things I have spoken unto you"—in John 15—that my joy might be fulfilled in you (verse 11).

Oh, God the Holy Spirit is not a Spirit who primarily keeps his children in the dark, and gives

them just a little glimpse here and there. Oh, this is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. This is the Spirit whose desire it is to glorify the Father and the Son. This is a Spirit whose goal it is to comfort, to comfort the believer, to comfort those who are united to Christ, and to comfort them with the knowledge of Christ.

And now, I come back to where I started, when I talked about the unique relationship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, emphasizing again this wonderful relationship between the Father and the Son. It's just like in a relationship between a husband and a wife, when they commune together. What happens? The husband expresses his thoughts to his wife, so his thoughts proceed from him to his wife. And then the wife responds, and her thoughts proceed from her to him. And so it is within the Holy Trinity. The Father communicates with his Son, in the Spirit; and the Son communicates with the Father, in the Spirit.

But that's how he also works, you see. That's how he works in the work of salvation. So let me put it very simply. As the Spirit of the Father, his work it is to lead us to the Son for reconciliation. As the Spirit of the Father, he leads us to the Son for reconciliation, for the conscious experience of that reconciliation. John 15, verse 26: "The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." The Spirit of the Father will testify of the Son, because it is only in the Son that we can be reconciled with God. It is only by coming to him and believing in him that we can obtain the pardon of our sins. It is only through the Son that our relationship with God can be restored. And again, from God's side, it is restored, the moment we are regenerated. But experientially, in order for the believer to benefit from that union, to experience the joy and the blessings of that union, we need to be led there experientially. And that's what the Spirit does. Again, as the Spirit of the Father, he will lead us to the Son. He will so work in us that we find our only hope in God's Son, so that the Lord Jesus Christ, as I said this morning, he becomes irresistibly attractive to our soul. That's his work. That's where the Spirit wants us. He wants us to kiss the Son, to embrace him by faith, and to experience the wonder of divine reconciliation, the wonder of divine pardon in and through Christ.

Paul writes of this in Ephesians 1, verse 17: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:"—that is, Christ—"the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." But is that the final goal of redemption? Is the final goal of redemption to be reconciled with the Father? No, that is but the foundation of it. That is but the foundation of a life with God and the Father with the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, reconciliation with God becomes the foundation of a life with God, in fellowship and communion with him. So here we go. So, the Spirit of the Father leads us to the Son for reconciliation. But as the Spirit of the Son, he will lead us to the Father for fellowship and communion with him. And so, there, you have it. There, you see how he fulfills that double role that matches exactly in how he functions within the Holy Trinity.

That's why Paul writes—listen carefully—Galatians 4, verse 6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." There, you have it—fellowship and communion with God. So let me say it once more. This is so important! As the Spirit of the Father, his work is to lead us to the Son, to obtain reconciliation, to obtain the pardon of our sins. And then, as the Spirit of the Son, he will lead us to the Father, so that we cry out "Abba, Father." Because that's the goal of redemption. God's goal is to bring us back into a love relationship with himself, a Father-child relationship. And that's exactly what the Holy Spirit accomplishes, so that we will experience the joy of his salvation. Psalm 132, verses 15 and 16, so beautifully, one of my favorite passages of Scripture, where God says: "I will abundantly bless her

provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread”—the Lord Jesus—“I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.”

That’s why John, in 1 John 2, when he talks about the three stages of spiritual life—being children, being young men, and being fathers. Who are the children? What’s the beginning stage? The children are those who know that their sins are forgiven, and who know that God is their Father. That’s stage number one. Then come the young men, who overcome the wicked ones. And then come the fathers, who have a deep and profound knowledge of God. But the basics are to know that my sins are forgiven, and that God is my Father for Christ’s sake. And that’s the Holy Spirit’s work; that’s his desire; that’s his goal.

And then, finally, it says: *And abide with me for ever*. Oh, what a precious truth that is! Given to me, and he comforts me, but he also abides with me. Oh, what a Spirit, who will never forsake the work of his own hands. And so dear child of God, he that has begun a good work in you, he will finish it. He will never abandon the work of his hands. And so he will work in you, work in you, at times chastise you, but work in you, because his desire is that you would grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. His work is described beautifully. Turn with me to Ephesians 3, verse 16. And let’s read it carefully. This is a beautiful passage: “To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;”—why?—“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ,”—that’s what the Spirit desires, dear believer, he wants you to know the love of Christ—“which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (verses 16–19). That’s it—“with all the fulness of God.” And so, that Spirit will so labor in us, will so labor in the believer that we will grow in the knowledge of Christ, that we will grow in spiritual fruitfulness; that the fruits of the spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith—will manifest themselves. And his great goal, ultimately, is that we would resemble Christ—predestined “to be conformed to the image of the Son” (Romans 8:29).

So what’s the goal of sanctification? What is the goal of the Spirit’s indwelling and abiding ministry?—it is to conform us to the Christ to whom we are united; the Christ in whom we have been chosen; the Christ by whom we have been redeemed; the Christ to whom we have been drawn; the Christ to whom we have been united. To that Christ, we must be conformed, to be forever with that Christ. And so, he labors within us, as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

Congregation, is there evidence in your life that that Spirit hath dwelt with you? It’s a week of preparation. And how do we know that that Spirit has dwelt with you, and if Christ has become precious to you, that your soul yearns for Christ, that that’s the yearning of your soul. Oh, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection. Oh, to know him! to know more of him! If this Jesus has become the altogether lovely one, and the chiefest among ten thousand, that’s the best evidence of the Spirit’s saving work. Because that’s what he does. He glorifies Christ. He so labors within the believer, to make this Christ increasingly precious, because he’s not satisfied unless we rest in Christ and his finished work.

And so, may this week be a profitable week, and may next week, at the Lord’s Table, the experience of ministering of the Spirit of Christ, enabling us to partake of that blessed spiritual meal, so that, by faith, we may eat his body and we may drink his blood; and that so our souls will be strengthened and refreshed; and that ultimately we would delight ourselves in this precious Christ; that Christ to whom that Spirit has united you; that Christ which he is glorifying within you; that Christ out of whom he takes and he shows it unto us. And so, may God dwell in our midst, and may we truly belong to those of whom Paul so profoundly says: “For as many as are led by the

Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Amen.

Let’s pray.

Our gracious God and Father, we give thee humble thanks that tonight we are privileged to focus on the glorious Person of thy blessed Spirit—the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son; that Spirit to whom we are so indebted; that Spirit which is the only true spiritual life; that Spirit who will glorify Christ. Lord, we pray that we will not grieve that Spirit. Oh, we so often forget that we have a holy and permanent resident within our soul. Oh, how we should honor him, how we should walk carefully, how we should kneel to his blessed impulses. Lord, we pray that through his abiding ministry, we may abide in Christ. Go with us in this coming week. Bless us in our daily calling. Bless us as parents. Bless our children and young people in school. And bless our preparation, and that it may be a delightful day next Lord’s Day, that at thy table, we may experience the wonderful ministry of the Spirit of Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.

