

Bible Class: Holy Spirit

Session 1: The Spirit Speaks

Winter 2022

Introduction to this Bible Class

Even in our increasingly irreligious society, people continue to talk about God, often in terms of His Fatherhood. The general public recognizes the name, person, and work of Jesus Christ. But what do those outside the church know of the third person of the Trinity? What do those *inside* the church know about the Holy Spirit?

The Lutheran church is perhaps especially open to the charge of “neglecting” the Holy Spirit. While one will not hear a Lutheran pastor preach even the shortest sermon without proclaiming Christ, Lutheran preaching often does not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit. Though this may be noted and criticized at times, Lutherans can say truth-fully—if perhaps somewhat surprisingly—that it is neither an oversight nor an accident. Rather, it is entirely in keeping with Scripture’s depiction of the office and work of the Spirit Himself.

As Jesus proclaimed to His disciples before His departure, the Spirit’s task will be to “remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26) and to “bring glory to Me” (John 16:14). The third person of the Trinity has no desire to draw attention to Himself; He has instead been sent for the purpose of directing our attention to God’s saving work in Christ. In this regard Dr. Martin Luther explained: “That then is the Holy Spirit’s office and work, that He through the gospel reveal what great and glorious thing God has done for us through Christ, namely, ransomed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, received us into his grace and care, and given us him-self wholly and sufficiently” (*Auslegungen über den Evangelisten Johannes*, Weimar edition, vol. 28, p. 82).

Where Christ is preached, Lutherans rejoice to believe, teach, and confess that the Spirit is always present and active. Far from neglecting the Spirit, Lutherans praise, honor, and glorify Him as God. This occurs not only when they speak *about* Him, but especially when in humble silence they allow Him to speak *to* them, to reveal the Savior and proclaim His salvation.

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*Sticks and stones may break my bones,
but words can never hurt me.*

—A nursery rhyme

Words. Are they really so powerless? Mere scribbles and sound bites can stop a dispute or end a friendship. Words can begin a marriage or begin a war. Stronger even than human speech are the words that proceed from the mouth of God. Thankfully, unlike so many of our words, God’s strong Word was written—and is still preached—for our benefit.

1. What are some of the various reasons, both positive and negative, that people have for speaking with one another? For what reason might God feel it necessary or desirable to verbally speak with those He has created?

Discerning Spirit

2. Read Psalm 33:6 and 2 Peter 3:5. Compare Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17. What do these passages say about words that come from God’s mouth? What makes these words do what they do?
3. God spoke His creation into being, but divine speech did not end there. Read Acts 1:2; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Peter 1:21; and 2 Timothy 3:16. Who is described as speaking in these passages? To whom does God speak? For what purpose?
4. While rejoicing that God would speak to His creation in human language, Christians also realize that some readers have difficulty understanding the Bible. Read 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 2 Corinthians 3:15–16. What do these passages say about the role of the Spirit in understanding God’s Word?

5. To understand Scripture—or any literature—requires an awareness of its major themes. Read Nehemiah 9:30 and John 16:7–8. Compare these with Titus 3:5 and John 20:22–23. According to these passages, how is the work of the Holy Spirit related to the biblical themes of Law and Gospel?
6. Jesus declared that the Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:39). Compare John 14:26 and 16:13–14. According to Jesus, what do the testimony of Scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit have in common?
7. Though the Holy Spirit speaks and acts through God’s external Word, there are spirits who do not do so. Read 1 John 4:1. What warning and exhortation does the author give? How might this exhortation be observed?

Word and Spirit

The Holy Spirit not only inspired the ancient and original authors of the Bible; He works even today through the external Word, continuing to fulfill God’s holy will.

8. How might understanding the emphases and intent of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of Scripture affect your attitude toward and approach to the study of the Bible?
9. What comfort can you take in knowing that where God’s Word is, there also is the Holy Spirit?

Sure Word

10. How might the way God has spoken to you through His Word affect the manner in which you speak to Him in prayer?
11. How might you respond to a friend who believes that God has spoken—or wonders if God has spoken—to him or her through means other than the revealed Word of Scripture?

Comparisons

Verbal Inspiration: The Holy Spirit led the prophets, evangelists, and apostles to write the books of the Bible. He guided their writing, inspiring their very words while working through their particular styles of expression. Therefore, the Bible’s words are God’s Word. Conservative Christian churches hold this view. Many also maintain that the original writings of the Bible were without error (inerrancy) but some mistakes entered the text as the scribes copied, edited, or translated the Scripture over the centuries.

Partial Inspiration: Christians affected by theological liberalism hold different views of the inspiration of the Bible. For example, some would assert that the Bible is God’s Word but the authors erred in some factual details. Others would say that the Bible contains God’s Word and the Spirit leads people today to determine which parts of the Bible God wants them to follow. Still others would say that the Bible is one testimony to God’s Word along with writings used in other religions.

Inspired Translations: Some churches hold that God inspired certain translations of the Bible. For example, the Eastern Orthodox church holds that the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament was inspired by God. Some English-speaking Protestants hold that God inspired the King James translation of the Bible.