

Sermon on the Holy Spirit

Lessons: Exod. 16:1-5; John 6:22, 24-36, 40
John 20:19-22, 24-29
True Christian Religion 139, 142, 151

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Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:28-29)

As we read from the True Christian Religion 151, believing in the Lord is not merely acknowledging Him with our mind, but also is actually doing His commandments. Acknowledging the Lord can be simply a matter of thought, involving some degree of understanding. But doing His commandments requires an acknowledgment from the will – not just thinking but acting. And that acting means doing the Lord's commandments, that is, living in accordance with the teachings of His Word. For us, the Lord's Word is the sole means through which we can draw near to the Lord. It is the means by which the Lord also enters and dwells within us.

This is evident from the teaching in True Christian Religion 142:

The Divine Power and Operation, which are meant by the Holy Spirit, are, in general, reformation and regeneration ... purification from evils, forgiveness of sins, and finally salvation. These ... are the powers which the Lord makes work in those who believe in Him, and who adapt and dispose themselves for His reception and indwelling. This is done by means of Divine truth, and in the case of Christians, by means of the Word; for the Word is the only means through which a person draws near to the Lord, and into which the Lord enters. However, it is divine truth from good that it is to be understood, and this is the same as faith from charity... By means of divine truth from good, that is by means of faith from charity, a person is reformed and regenerated.... (TCR 142)

The Holy Spirit signifies the Divine Truth and thus also the Word. When we are in the Word and the Word is in us, which comes from living our life according to it, the Word is the Lord's dwelling place or abode within us. When we go to the Word seeking truth, especially when we go to the Word for the purpose of living according to it, we go immediately to the source of all truth. All truth from the Lord is contained in the Word and is present there. The

difficulty is that we may not, and often are not, in a state to see and receive it. The Word contains the truth, but to see it we need light. Enlightenment is an operation of the Holy Spirit, and this enlightenment is received in accord with the quality of the recipients, or rather in accord with our quality. No person or angel is in the same degree or kind of enlightenment. The degree to which we receive enlightenment from the Holy Spirit is in accordance with our nature, that is, in accordance with our spiritual state.

With those in good the Holy Spirit is received in one way, but with those in evil it is received in another, namely, by an internal rejection although there may be an outward appearance of acceptance. The Holy Spirit, that is, the Divine Truth proceeding from the Lord through the heavens, and thence into those of the church, gives us enlightenment and instruction. It gives us an understanding of the Word. In a larger sense, a church as a whole is according to the reception of the Holy Spirit by its members. As it is with an individual, so it is with the church as a whole. It is not just according to the understanding, but more so according to its life that a Church has its quality. A church whose members may perhaps be well-versed in doctrine, but who do not live according to what they profess to believe, showing little evidence of having charity together with their faith, is really no church at all, but just an organization with the name of a church attached to it.

The powers and operations of the Holy Spirit are in general reformation and regeneration. These two are of the Holy Spirit because they are done by means of the Divine Truth, which is the Holy Spirit. Without the enlightenment and instruction which comes from receiving some truth, the other operations of the Holy Spirit could not take place. For example, no one can be reformed and regenerated who does not have some truths of faith from the Word. Yet, we cannot receive any truths of faith from the Word unless we first receive some enlightenment and instruction from the Word. So how are we to begin? We must begin by approaching and living according to the natural sense of Word. This is the sense which we first understand. That sense serves as both the basis of the internal sense and the sense by which we are given enlightenment.

The understanding of the natural sense of the Word, that is, the sense of the letter, should not be something separate from our regeneration. The very beginnings of our regeneration start from the truths we see in the sense of the letter of the Word. The very beginnings of our spiritual growth or spiritual development are found in the natural sense of the Lord's Word. This degree of the Word dwells within in our memory and natural understanding.

And as we are reformed, regenerated, and perfected, which is the operation of the Holy Spirit, these same truths from the Word that dwell within us are not only the basis for change, but also are themselves changed. When we live according to the truths that we understand from the sense of the letter of the Word, bit by bit evils and falsities are removed. And as evils and falsities are removed, we are given more understanding and enlightenment, as well as a deeper understanding and enlightenment. What were formerly external appearances of truth become more genuine spiritual truths. These spiritual truths are not seen apart from the sense of the letter, but are seen within that sense. During the progress of our regeneration, we come out of understanding the letter in a purely natural way, and come into a deeper spiritual sense in which the letter of the Word is understood in a more spiritual way.

The letter of the Word always remains fixed, but our understanding of that letter changes. Just as the letter of the Word means different things to different people, it also means different things to the same person when he is in different states. Yet it is not that the letter of the Word has changed, but it is our understanding of that letter that is changing. Because of this difference in the way the letter is understood, as we make progress in our spiritual development, that is, as we are being regenerated we may from time to time observe that we are understanding the same passages of the Word in a wholly different way. We gain new insights into its meaning and application. We may even come to find that we totally disagree with our former understanding. And yet that former understanding, and living according to it, may have been the means by which we have come to our present understanding. No matter what our degree of understanding the Word may be, whether it be natural or spiritual or most likely some mix in between, we need to always focus upon what is its meaning or application to our life. The Lord's Word, in all our varied states and understandings, is meant to be lived.

Amen.

Prayer:

Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool; He *is* holy.
Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill;
for the LORD our God *is* holy. (Psalm 99:5, 9)

READINGS

Lesson I

Exodus 16:1-5

¹And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai....

²And the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain Bread from Heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. ⁵And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

John 6:22, 24-36, 40

²²On the following day, ...²⁴when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they ... got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”

²⁶Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

²⁸Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

³⁰Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’*”

³²Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

³⁵And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. . . . ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Lesson II

John 20:19-22, 24-29 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you."

²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

²² And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵ The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

²⁶ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

Lesson III

TCR 139. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Truth and also the Divine Power and Operation proceeding from the one God in whom is the Divine Trinity, that is, from the Lord God the Savior.

TCR 142. The Divine Power and Operation, which are meant by the Holy Spirit, are, in general, reformation and regeneration ... purification from evils, forgiveness of sins, and finally salvation. These ... are the powers which the Lord makes work in those who believe in Him....

TCR 151. Believing in the Lord is not merely acknowledging Him but also doing His commandments; for simply acknowledging Him is solely a matter of thought, arising from something of the understanding; but doing His commandments is also a matter of acknowledgment from the will. A person's mind consists of understanding and will; and as the understanding deals with thinking and the will with doing, so when a person only acknowledges *the Lord* from the thought of his understanding, he comes to the Lord with only half of his mind; but when he acts, then he comes with all of it; and this is believing.

But on the other hand, a person is able to divide his heart, and to force the superficial part of him to soar aloft, while his flesh turns downward; thus he flies like an eagle between heaven and hell. Yet, he does not follow his [upward] gaze, but the delight of his flesh; and because this is in hell; therefore to hell he flies; and when he has there sacrificed to his voluptuous pleasures and poured out libations to demons, he puts on a countenance of merriment, and his eyes sparkle with fire, and so he feigns himself an angel of light. Such satans do those become after death, who acknowledge the Lord, but do not keep His commandments.

AMEN.