

## Description of the Holy Spirit and His Work

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think a lot of people today are asking questions like how you heal and how you overcome depression, and how do you pray and it seems like we have a multitude of how questions. It seems that we always have a multitude of how questions when people are eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and not too much of the tree of life. If you remember, when Mary asked the angel, "How can these things be?" And the angel said, "You shall conceive and the child shall be born in your womb." The angel answered, "By the Holy Spirit."

And it seems that all the "how" questions are answered by life, by the life of the Holy Spirit. But when there's an abundance of knowledge and a shortage of life, then I think there are a lot of questions and very few answers. I feel that in a way, even in spirit filled circles today, that's the problem. There are a great many of us who are saying, "This is the way to the Holy Spirit. This is the way to receive the Holy Spirit. This is the way to be filled with the Holy Spirit." But there is surprisingly little of the sensitive life of the Holy Spirit alive among us.

And it does seem that you can often talk about the Holy Spirit and teach about the Holy Spirit without actually living in the stream of the life of the Holy Spirit. And, I think it is important, you know, just to see that really it's the Holy Spirit alone that gives life. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, this is really what Paul says, that the old letter kills in a written code but in the spirit for a written code kills but the spirit gives life. And I think John 6:63 states the same thing, that it's in the spirit that real life is.

And I think that it is true that if we, in our bodies, here of Christ, give more respect to the Holy Spirit than we did to ideas, I think we'd receive more life of the Holy Spirit into us. I think too, we'd be led to the person of Jesus rather than the principles of Jesus. Old Stanley Jones was good, he said, "Unity comes when people are preoccupied with the person of Christ rather than the principle of Christ." And really, if we honored the Holy Spirit and respected him in our own individual lives, more of us would be preoccupied with the person of Christ and we'd be led into real unity than preoccupied with the principles of Christ.

I think this is the real reason for Jesus' command to the apostles. You remember, they had experienced more of truth and reality than any of us probably will ever do in a sense and they had walked, and ate, and slept with this man who was absolute truth and yet this man said to them, "Listen, after I die I don't want you to leave Jerusalem, I want you to stay there to wait for the promise of the Father which is coming to you." This seems to be the reason why Jesus emphasized this command, because he knew that he could bring principles and he could teach truths, but only the Holy Spirit could give actual life.

And I think this is why he emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit in John 14. He talked of the Holy Spirit as someone without whom we could not do at all. John 14:16-17, "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, 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." And Jesus emphasized that unless the Holy Spirit came to them, really all that he had said was of little value.

I think this is why such serious consequences were taught in the early church for blaspheming the

Holy Spirit. People blasphemed and lied to Jesus and yet they were not struck dead. But in Act 5:3-5, Ananias and Sapphira you remember, lied to the Holy Spirit when they kept back the proceeds of the land and they were struck dead for that. It seems that in doing this kind of thing God was guarding the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit was someone very precious that he wanted his people to honor and obey. And you remember blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is reckoned in Mark 3:29, to be the unpardonable sin. That is the sin that will not be forgiven, if you blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

I think this is the reason too for the battle that took place in the fourth century in the early church about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Many of us think of the battle over the divinity of Jesus that took place around the time of the Creed of Nicene. But really it was in 381 at Constantinople that at last the early church agreed that the Holy Spirit was a divine person of the Trinity. And it seems that this was such a long drawn out battle because Satan realized that if people did not treat the Holy Spirit as what he was, a real person in the Trinity then all would be lost as far as Jesus' death had gone.

I think the importance of the Holy Spirit is implied really in that benediction that we use most Sundays in church. It's the benediction mentioned in 2 Corinthians 13:14 and it's that verse from which we get the implied doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible. 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." It would seem very strange if Paul were to say, "The grace of Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of Peter be with you all." We would feel, "Ah no, that is wrong. Peter isn't on the same level at all with Jesus and with God." And yet Paul feels it is very natural to say, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Implying that the Holy Spirit is equally important with the Father and the Son and he's just like them.

So, that's really brothers why I think it's important to see that the Holy Spirit is someone who is pre-imminently important in these days, these days that we call the age of the Holy Spirit. What I'd like to try to talk about a little is who the Holy Spirit is first of all. I think it's important to see that he is a person. Ephesians 4:30 talks about the Holy Spirit being someone who can be grieved. We often insult him as treating him as a force or an influence and I think it's good to see that he is a person with a real will, and a real mind, and real desires and it is possible for the Holy Spirit to interact with you and me, and it is possible for his mind to become our mind and for his will to deal with our will.

This is I think, what we feel at times in our own Christian lives when we find something stirring within us wanting us to go a certain way. It is the will of the Holy Spirit. When a person becomes a Christian it is because the will of the Holy Spirit has taken over his will, or his will has cooperated now with the will of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a divine person; he's not just an influence. Jesus told us that he was to be his successor. He was to complete what Christ himself began. Jesus said that we were dead in our sins but it's the Holy Spirit that makes us really realize that we're dead.

Jesus can say, "You must be born of the Spirit," but it's the Holy Spirit that makes us actually come alive. And, it's the Holy Spirit that is the successor of Jesus in that he makes real to us the things that Jesus talked about. He is a successor in a real way. He can do things for us that Jesus cannot do. I think we often forget that. I think we feel, "Oh, Jesus can do everything." No, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father today and he can only influence us as the Holy Spirit brings his life to us. The Holy Spirit was even so important to Jesus that Jesus said, "Unless the

Holy Spirit had anointed me, I could not preach the gospel to the poor, I could not heal the broken hearted, I could not bind up wounds.” He said, “The Holy Spirit has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” So, it was the Holy Spirit that gave even Jesus the power to do these things.

Many of us say, “Oh well, I mean, you ask Jesus to do the thing and he’ll do it anyway.” But, it is good to see that it’s wrong for us to look to one person of the Trinity to do what that person expressly told us another person of the Trinity would do. And this is what Jesus said in John 16:7-8. He really pointed out that it was the Holy Spirit who would do things for us that he could not do for us at this time, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.”

Significant that it says in the Bible that Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it and it’s the Holy Spirit who comes to convict the world of sin. Jesus himself does not convict it. So, in many ways Jesus showed us that the Holy Spirit would do things that he could not do and we should look to him to do them. Really we ourselves in our studies, and our preaching, and our positions as husbands, and our positions as sons; I think we would be freer in our relationships if we really did honor the Holy Spirit. Maybe too often we look to our wives, or we look to our fathers or mothers to see how we can really be a blessing to them, or how we can be like Christ to them. Maybe if we honored the Holy Spirit himself, and spent more time loving him, and respecting him, and obeying him, we would automatically be better husbands and more sensitive people in our families.

This is the kind of thing that Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do for us. That he would really bring Jesus real in our own lives and make him real. I think we often have looked upon the Holy Spirit as the force that comes upon a meeting, a great influence that comes upon a Billy Graham evangelistic service, and this is just insulting the Holy Spirit. All of us have objected to people treating us as machines. You, Mike, would hate to be treated in the library as a kind of book machine that just shot out a book when you shot your card in. And I hated it most when men treated me as a pastor, “He’s a pastor and that’s the kind of thing he’s supposed to do.” And we all feel this, oh insult, to our personalities when people treat us as functions and yet I think often we have grieved the Holy Spirit because we have treated him as a function, who will do certain things, or influence us in certain ways instead of treating him as a real dear person whom we can love and who can love us.

The Bible uses the same terms of the Holy Spirit as it does of the Father and the Son. It’s good to see that, that in a sense you can think of the Father as God existing and the son as God revealing, and the Holy Spirit as God communicating and yet they are all equal and equally important. And omnipresence of the Father is attributed to the Holy Spirit. All these invisible qualities that God has and the Son has, the Holy Spirit is said to have also. Indeed, you can see in connection with the Constantinople conference that belief in the Holy Spirit was the last test of orthodoxy as far as Christians were concerned. And even today we would think that orthodox Christians are Trinitarians, people who really believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe it’s good to see lastly about this whole question of who is the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit is the real gift. Maybe we’ve made a tremendous mistake in our bodies today in looking for pardon, or cleansing, or peace as the gifts instead of looking to the Holy Spirit as the gift. You remember, in Acts 2:38, it was the Holy Spirit who was promised as the gift to the new converts.

The men asked Peter, "Oh, what should we do?" And he said, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And it wasn't, "That you shall receive the gift of pardon, or the gift of cleansing, or the gift of peace, or the gift of forgiveness but, "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

It seems that if we're looking for the Holy Spirit it would help a lot if we'd look for the Holy Spirit and not for his gifts. All the other things that he gives are gifts of his. He gives the nine gifts of the Spirit outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and he provides the nine fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23, but the Holy Spirit himself is the gift. Jesus emphasizes that you know, in John 15:26 and I'd just refer maybe to John 8:13, where Jesus says, "It's the Holy Spirit that you need, it's not pardon and cleansing that you need, it's the Holy Spirit. He will bring the rest of the things to you." The Pharisees and John 16:7 he says when the Holy Spirit comes, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away," not peace will not come to you, or forgiveness will not come to you, or sense of glory will not come to you but, "The Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" a person.

So, that's something brothers of who the Holy Spirit is. What was the Holy Spirit's relationship to the church, to the early church? I think we find that the Holy Spirit was absolutely responsible for the early church. Without the Holy Spirit the early church wouldn't have existed really. The Holy Spirit started the church. You remember there was no movement of a church. Jesus certainly talked about his church but there was no creation of a church until Acts 2:4 took place, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

It was only when the Holy Spirit fell upon these men that they began to gather together in the unique community that was called the church and that, you know, outlasted Domitian and Nero, and all the other Emperors that tried to destroy it. The Holy Spirit began the church and Acts 2:17-18 you get that emphasis again that this would take place, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and then your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." And none of this would take place until the Holy Spirit came.

It was the Holy Spirit who began the church. It was the Holy Spirit we saw that was promised as the gift to the new converts. It wasn't peace or forgiveness, it was the Holy Spirit. Wait for the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who disciplined the church. It's good for us, I think, to see that especially in our situation where we tend to feel that man is so important. I mean, we are precious to each other and I know I'm precious to you as you're precious to me, but it's very important to see that it's not the elders, it's not the pastor, it's not we men that discipline the church, it's the Holy Spirit himself. Acts 5:3, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Bishop?' "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Elders?" No, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?"

I really do feel that if we had that attitude to the Holy Spirit as the disciplinarian in the body, it brings forth a great freedom. It brings for instance, me into tremendous freedom that I don't feel that when I'm reflecting something to Tim, or something to you Mike, that it's my discipline or I'm teaching you how to do something that I know better than you. But suddenly we all become aware, "Yes, he's just calling me back to the Holy Spirit." I felt that, I have to say it Tim, even though we're recording, that when you were pushing me to record and to put this on tape it was good to feel

you're not disciplining me. This isn't Tim trying to discipline the pastor of the body, but it's Tim calling me back to what the Holy Spirit wants me to do.

And it seems that's the atmosphere that God wants, you know, where the Holy Spirit is the disciplinarian in the church and we all feel we are responsible to this invisible person that is moving among us and that is expressing himself through different ones of us at different times. It seems that that's why the church can be a mutual experience. It seems that's what takes the whole responsibility from one man to lead the church and discipline the church, and advise the church. Suddenly we begin to find that all of us men are being used by the Holy Spirit to speak forth his word to each of us at different times.

It seems to me there's a great balance, and a great set of balances and counteracting forces there that saves us from wild individualism and fanaticism. But the Holy Spirit was the one who disciplined the Church. The Holy Spirit was the one who directed the leaders in evangelistic activity. I think it's good to see that in Acts 16:6-7, because a lot of us, especially we here who are concerned with getting 10,000 of us out here into the world for Jesus, we wonder well, "Where do you go? Do you go to India Mike where you have had some experience?" Or, do we go Tim to London and specialize there? Or, do we go to South America with Sue or to Bolivia with Wally and Marg who have had some experience in Bolivia? Do we go where the Holy Spirit tells us? And it seems that it's plain you know, Acts 16:6-7 states that, "And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." And so they avoided Asia not because they didn't know Asia but because the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to speak the word there. "And when they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."

This is the kind of discipline that the Holy Spirit exerted over the missionaries of the early church and it seems to me it's the kind of discipline that he wants to exercise over us in our missionary strategy. The Holy Spirit apparently can see deeper than we can. It's not a matter of looking for the underprivileged countries, it's not a matter of looking for the non-lost of lands, or looking for the lands that will be freshest and most open to the gospel, but it's really a question of following the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit directed the evangelistic strategy of the early church.

The Holy Spirit ministers to the world. It seems even in the New Testament it wasn't the church that ministered to the world but it was the Holy Spirit. You remember, Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." It wasn't the church that was to convince the world of sin but the Holy Spirit. I think the church has become so often a mealy mouthed kind of harmless milk and water organization or it has seemed to other people as a downright fanatical narrow minded fundamentalist oppressive operation because the church has tried to convince the world of sin. Instead of just living before the world in the Spirit of Jesus, the church has tried to convince the world of sin.

Now, the Holy Spirit is the one that ministers to the world through the church. So, it is really good to see that the Holy Spirit is the one who will do the main work of the church and will do these things for our church today. Perhaps it would be good just to look for a moment or two at what the Holy Spirit does in connection with Jesus himself, in other words, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jesus. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit "would tell us who he was. John 15:26, "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me."

Many of us say, "Oh, we know who Jesus is, he's the son of God, he lived in the first century, we have manuscripts to back up his historicity. He's the one that healed the lepers; he's the one that called Peter and John to follow him." Those are the historical facts of Jesus and through those facts we can know him as we know Winston Churchill, but the truth is that the Holy Spirit can bring us into a personal knowledge of Jesus. Even though he lived 1900 years ago, he can enable us to know Jesus as really and more really than even the disciples knew him. The disciples for instance, knew Jesus after the flesh and yet when it came to the time of his trial they forsook him and fled. That's how well they knew him after the flesh.

It seems that the Holy Spirit can bring to us a knowledge of Jesus that is even finer, and more sensitive, and more detailed than that in the New Testament. I'm not saying, you know, that we go on to new revelations that are beyond the New Testament, but the Holy Spirit interprets the details of the New Testament picture to us in ways that we've never seen before.

It was just a revelation to me in my prayer times, when I began to discover that I could get up from prayer knowing Jesus in a deeper and a more sensitive way than I knew him when I first knelt down to pray. And yet, it wasn't that I could tell you of some quality that I didn't know he had before, that I discovered, but it was him himself. I met him in a new way and the Holy Spirit will tell us who Jesus is in that way. The Holy Spirit will make Jesus real in our own lives. He'll reveal Jesus to us. He'll interpret scripture to us. Jesus said this in John 16:14, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Some of us have used this kind of illustration that oh you could bring the most beautiful paintings into this room at the moment, Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper and the crucifixion and St. John of the Cross, and have them around the walls of this room and then I could bring you into the room and say, "Aren't these beautiful paintings?" And never switch the light on you and you'd say, "Well, I can't see a thing, darkness, absolute darkness." And then when I switch the light on you'd see these beautiful master pieces lined up around the walls of the room.

Now, it seems to be the same with the Holy Spirit, you can talk about the beauties of Jesus, but until the Holy Spirit has made them real to you, and revealed them to you, and lit them up for you, there is no beauty in them. It's the Holy Spirit who interprets scripture and enables us really to understand scripture. The Holy Spirit makes the things of Jesus real and fresh. They happened 2000 years ago but he makes them real and fresh today. That's really what Jesus is saying in John 15 and that verse where Jesus says, "He will take of the things that are mine and communicate them to you," and the Greek word means you know, make them real with you, share them with you in a way that you will understand.

And it seems that, oh you can talk of Jesus and he's just a historical figure until the Holy Spirit makes it real and alive. Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit will glorify him." I was always baffled when I read about that. I thought, "Oh yeah, that means we'll all glorify Jesus. We'll glorify Jesus." We'll say, "Oh, Jesus you're wonderful, you're great. Oh, you're a good Lord, you're a good Lord." And I used to think, you know, that praising and glorifying Jesus seemed to me rather a flattering kind of attitude towards Jesus and it never struck me as a manly thing to do, everybody would be around glorifying one person.

But I think it's good when you see that the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus in this way. He takes of the things of Jesus and reproduces them in our lives so that the world sees Jesus alive inside us

and that's all the world needs to do to glorify him. Jesus will automatically be glorified when the world sees him again and that's really the way the Holy Spirit glorifies him. He imparts to us the very beauties of Jesus' own life and then the world sees Jesus alive again and simply falls before him and worships him.

It seems that the same way the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin. We often feel, he'll come straight down and strike them dead, or strike them in their conscious. No, I think the Holy Spirit will reproduce the beauties of Jesus in you and me and then the world will see the beauty and the balance of our lives and the peace of our emotions, and the love in our hearts, and the world will be convicted of its own ugliness. And that's the way the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin.

Maybe I could just end by talking for a couple of minutes about the Holy Spirit and us ourselves. The Holy Spirit, if we allow him will miraculously take the life of Jesus and make it real in us. This is the unique factor in Christianity. Mohammad cannot make himself real in us, but Jesus can make himself real in us. The Holy Spirit can take the love of Jesus and make it real in us.

It meant a lot to me when I at last saw that when 1 Corinthians 13 describes the love of Jesus, if I'm really allowing the Holy Spirit to do what he wants in me, then it will describe me. And I know you've maybe heard it before, but just to be able to say, you know, "I am not jealous or boastful. I am not arrogant or rude. I do not insist on my own way. I am not irritable or resentful. I am not glad when others go wrong. I am glad when others are right. I believe all things. I bear all things. I endure all things. My love never ends." It seems that that's what happens when the Holy Spirit takes the love of Jesus and makes it real in each one of us. And when he takes the forgiveness of Jesus and makes it real in us and the humility of Jesus, not that old diffidence or that humiliation, or that timidity, or that modesty that we call humility but real humility of Jesus a willingness to be rated low, a willingness to waive our rights as Jesus did whether we're praised or blamed for his sake. Those qualities, those unique supernatural qualities the Holy Spirit will make real in us.

So it seems to me this is some of his work and some of his ministry and oh, we would just transformed people if we would really honor the Holy Spirit and ask him to make the supernatural life of Jesus real in us and he will really. You know, in these next meetings I'd really like to begin to talk of how the Holy Spirit will make real in us the purity and the power of Jesus.