

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

*You Must be Born Again!*

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*I Believe in the Holy Spirit – The  
Apostles' Creed, Part 8*

*December 3, 2023*

**Sermon Text: Romans 8 12-16**

**Scripture Reading: Joel 2:18-32**

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

In our consideration of the Apostles' Creed, we come this morning to the fewest words given to the three Persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Faith in Him is simply confessed:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*

I suggest to you this morning with confidence that a very large portion of what claims to be the Christian church today gives lip service to this truth, but in fact, theirs is a false confession. Why do I say this? Because of this:

2Ti 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

What is the role of the Holy Spirit? When we confess that we believe in Him, what are we saying? Are we simply acknowledging that there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity? That there is such a “thing” as the Spirit? No. There has to be more to this *because even the devil can say “I believe in the Holy Spirit”* to that degree.

To confess faith in the Holy Spirit is also to confess *that true religion, real Christianity, is this:*

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

A true Israelite, a true child of Abraham, that is to say – a true Christian – *is a person who has had a heart transplant, effected by the Holy Spirit.* It is to confess this:

Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the

flesh, sold under sin.

And this:

Eze 36:22-27 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. (23) And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. (24) I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. (25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (26) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put

my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Jer 31:31-33 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Joh 3:5-8 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (8) The wind

blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Understand? To truly confess, without hypocrisy, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit,*” is to confess belief that a Christian, a true child of Abraham, is a new creation, born again by the regenerating miracle effected by the Holy Spirit.

To confess in truth, *I believe in the Holy Spirit,* is to confess that we reject all external counterfeits of Christ’s church:

Mat 23:26-28 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (27) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. (28) So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

One of the chief reasons that J.C. Ryle's sermons are so powerful is that he quite often challenged his listeners on this very point – to examine themselves to see if their religion was that of the Spirit of Christ and no merely some external form:

- Are You Born Again?
- Authentic Religion
- Practical Religion – Self Inquiry
- The Power of the Holy Spirit
- The True Church

And many more. Ryle knew, as does any true minister of Christ, that there is an ever-present danger of many people thinking themselves to be right with God and yet their religion is a mere outward form. They are not born again by the Spirit's mighty re-creating power.

Jonathan Edwards wrote and preached on the same subject. He addressed that class of hypocrites which he called "Sinners in Zion." He derives that phrase from this warning of God's wrath against the

Israelites who, like the hypocrites of Jesus' day, regarded themselves as certain to be approved of by God despite their unrepentant evil:

Amo 6:1 "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes!"

John Bunyan warned this kind as well in his series (which we went through as well), *The Barren Fig Tree: The Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professor*.

Any true minister of the gospel will most certainly and soberly and often warn his listeners of this business of what is also called *formal religion*. J.C. Ryle opened his series on this subject this way:

"Having a form of godliness — but denying the power thereof." 2 Timothy 3:5

"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a

man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." Romans 2:28-29

READER,

The texts which head this page deserves your serious attention at any time. I take it for granted that you have some religion. You are not an infidel. You profess and call yourself a Christian. Well, is your Christianity formal or spiritual? Is religion with you a matter of form — or a matter of the heart? Is it form — or heart?

The question deserves especial notice in this age of the church and world. Never since the Lord Jesus Christ left the earth, was there so much formality and false profession, as there is at the present day. Now, if ever, we ought to examine ourselves, and search our religion, so that we may know of what sort it is. Reader, let us find out whether our Christianity is a thing of form — or a thing of heart.

I know no better way of unfolding the subject than by turning to a plain passage of the Word of God. Let us hear what the apostle Paul says about it. He lays down the following great principles in his Epistle to the Romans: "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." Three most instructive lessons appear to me to stand out on the face of that passage. Let us see what they are.

We learn, firstly, that formal religion is not true religion; and a formal Christian is not a true Christian in God's sight.

We learn, secondly, that the heart is the seat of true religion, and that the true Christian is the Christian in heart.

We learn, thirdly, that true religion must never expect to be popular. It

will not have the "praise of man — but of God."

Let us thoroughly consider these great principles. Two hundred years have passed away since a mighty Puritan divine said, "Formality, formality, formality, is the great sin of England at this day, under which the land groans. There is more light than there was — but less life; more shadow — but less substance; more profession — but less holiness." (Thomas Hall, 1658). What would this good man have said if he had lived in our times?

All of this, this rejection of mere form of godliness but hollow and void in heart is what we confess when we say, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, IF we confess it in truth. Yet every week throughout this nation, people are attending, for example, a funeral service in a church building and leaving having been assured by a preacher who loves his income more than God's Word that they, like the dead man, are surely headed straight for heaven. When in fact they are headed

straight to hell. Because their religion is a form. It has no saving power because the Holy Spirit is not present in it. A Spiritless Christianity is a Christless Christianity.

Listen to the Apostle Paul once again:

Rom 8:12-16 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, **but if by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) **For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.** (15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, **but you have received the Spirit** of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) **The Spirit himself bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God,

And look at what Paul said just before this:

Rom 8:5-11 For those who live according to the flesh set their

minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. (6) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

(7) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

**(9) You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

(10) But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) **If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.**

The Lord cannot be any clearer on this – *a religion devoid of the Holy Spirit is a dead thing that cannot save.* A person practicing such a delusion is a dead man imitating a living human being – a spiritual zombie. *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

### Gone With the Wind

I believe in the Holy Spirit. That means I believe in the Spirit who is invisible, and yet powerful and mighty. A Christian is a person who we might say is *Gone With the Wind*. Why? Because the old man is gone. How did that happen? By the power of God's Wind –

Joh 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Born of the Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit and therefore I believe that a true church consists of people who are born of the Spirit. I didn't see the Spirit, just as I cannot

see the air which the wind consists of, but I can see the effects of that wind. I can see leaves rustling and sometimes even huge trees falling.

We need to be wise. Much wiser. When we confess *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, then we are confessing among other truths that we believe in the new birth, in the fruit of the Spirit, in the inevitable radical changes the Spirit effects in a person who is now born again. *We need to stop making excuses for one another when God's Word leaves no room for such excuses.*

Where the Spirit of Christ is present, the Spirit's fruit will be evident. Not maybe, but will be. Let me give you an example of this deadly excuse-making.

Let's say a man claims to be a Christian. He is a church member, in church every Sunday, generously tithes – all these things. Now, imagine him doing something that genuinely and understandably offends or even frightens his neighbors. He does this habitually. His neighbors ask him to stop as it is scaring them.

And he refuses. He tells them he has a legal right to do what he is doing and that they can't make him stop. He sleeps quite well that night and every night.

Is that man a Christian? Is this a man who is indwelt and led by the Spirit. Is this the fruit of the Spirit we see in him? And yet – I have known a person just like this – other professing Christians insist that though they don't like to be around him much and though he treats his neighbors this way, they still believe he is a Christian.

What the does Lord say?

1Jn 3:9-10 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. (10) By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Now that is just one example. Let's



not deceive ourselves and say “well, I would never treat my neighbors like that so obviously I am a Christian.” There are many other evil fruits of the flesh which betray the fact that one’s religion is devoid of the Spirit.

such things there is no law. (24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (26) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Gal 5:16-26 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against

And just in case anyone thinks they are doing quite well in respect to this list of the flesh – do not miss that last little phrase Paul adds at the end just to catch a hypocrite up –

*“Let us not become conceited.”*

All of this and more is what is meant when we confess, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*” What is your religion? Is it of the heart, by the Spirit? Or is it a mere outward shell – a lie. Are you truly a citizen of Zion, or are you a hypocrite at ease in Zion? These are vital questions which concern eternity and which we dare not deceive ourselves in answering.

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