

The Holy Spirit - Belgic Confession art. 11

Article 11: The Holy Spirit True and Eternal God

We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is neither made, created, nor begotten, but he can only be said to proceed from both. In order he is the third person of the Holy Trinity, of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

- *'He is, together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God.'* (Lord's Day 20)
- *'And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son'. (Nicene Creed).*
- *'We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son.'* (Belgic Confession, article 11).

Nicene Creed: 'and the Son'

The words 'and the Son' in the Nicene Creed are added to the Nicene Creed in later time. This caused a lot of discussion between the eastern and western church and led to the Schism in 1054, between the eastern church (Eastern Orthodox Church) and the western church (the Roman Catholic Church, and later also the Reformed Churches). The Eastern Orthodox Church does not have these two words. As a result, the Eastern Orthodox Church believes that the Spirit can work apart from the Word of God.

However, the Lord Jesus Himself makes clear in John 16:13-15, that all that the Holy Spirit will make known to the Church comes from Christ. The Spirit does not work apart from the Son:
However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

The work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit not only works in the time of the New Testament. He is already mentioned in the Old Testament. Genesis 1:2 mentions the Spirit. The Spirit is also mentioned when David (and also others) were anointed as king (1 Samuel 16:13). The Spirit gives life (Psalm 104:30) and also gives talents to special people to fulfill their task (e.g. prophets, priests, kings).

The Holy Spirit not only works in nature, but His work is also part of God's plan of salvation. He works faith (Romans 10:17) and by doing so He works new (spiritual) life. And He also gives people talents to work within the Church of Christ, to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-14).

In summary, the work of the Spirit:

1. In creation: a) He gives life.
 b) He gives to men talents to fulfill their tasks.

2. In salvation: a) He gives and perfects new (eternal) life, through faith.
 b) He gives men talents to build Christ's congregation and to honour God.

Special gifts of the Spirit?

In 1 Corinthians 12 we read about special gifts of the Spirit. Today, still many Christians believe that believers should be able to do these things, at least to speak in tongues. Others believe that if your faith is strong enough, you can pray to God and receive healing through prayer.

The Reformed Churches generally have rejected this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12 and other places where the Bible mentions the special gifts of the Spirit.

In the New Testament we read about special gifts of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, etc., which were given to the apostles and others in those early days of the Christian Church. In those days, the church did not have the complete Bible yet. The Spirit worked faith by the preaching of the Word, but by the use of these special gifts this preaching was supported, so that the hearers received an additional confirmation that this was God's work and not human work. Now we have the complete Bible and we must accept the Bible and believe it and that must be sufficient.

In 1 Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul writes about this:

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

The word 'perfect' in verse 10 has the meaning 'complete'. Now that we have the complete Word of God, then those signs which are incomplete ('in part') will not be needed anymore and fall away.