



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

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Editor
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A Three-Fold Relationship with the Triune God

But I trust in the LORD. I will rejoice and be glad for Thy steadfast love. *Psalm 31:6-7 (RSV)*



Rev. Gary Kiontke



In the early 1990s while driving to work I listened to the *Songtime* radio program. One morning, after Loren Decker played *Trust and Obey*, John DeBrine said both the title and the song summarize the Christian life. Genuine faith in God through Jesus leads to obedience and a right relationship with God. And, the order is important. It is impossible to obey God without being in Him by faith.

About ten years later, in January of my last year at seminary, the church where I served as an honorary elder asked me to teach the letter of *1 Peter*. As I dug into the familiar first chapter, where Peter describes how the mercy of God causes people to be born again into a living hope by faith, and the future salvation which the prophets of old sought to understand as they preached the gospel by the Holy Spirit (*verses 1-12*), I was struck that salvation for those with faith in Jesus had been promised for centuries before He came to earth. Then Peter gives the command to be holy as God is holy (*verses 13-15*). In doing this he quotes a command from the middle of *Leviticus*, the book about holiness: the holiness of God, and the need for His people to be holy as He is holy.

As I reflected on this, I realized that in His grace, God often put words of truth and promise in close context with His commands. And, it brought me back to what John DeBrine had spoken of a decade earlier from the song *Trust and Obey*.

My last course at seminary was in Old Testament Theology and taught by the president of the seminary. We read many books about the dominant theme of the Old Testament. Every author had a different theme. Our final paper was to critique the book written by the president. His theme, borrowed from a nineteenth century theologian, was

‘promise theology.’ He went to great lengths to show the overriding theme of the Old Testament was about promises God gave to His people, especially messianic promises fulfilled in Jesus. As I prayed about my paper, I recalled *Trust and Obey* and how Peter used the fulfillment of messianic promises as the basis for an important command. In my paper, I concluded his single theme was inadequate. With all respect, I showed that in Scripture God gave people BOTH promises to believe AND commands to obey. Doing both leads to being in a relationship with God, and receiving blessings from him. I backed my position with passages from both James and Paul. I believed this two-pronged theme of how God relates to people would enable me to minister to people as pastor of FCC: In His great love, God has given people promises to believe and commands to obey, and His commands are linked with promises to enable people to obey them.

However, one truth about God is that we can never know all there is to know about Him and His ways with people ...



About three years ago I was in my car with the radio off. I was using the time to be with God and communicate with Him. I was giving Him thanks, petitioning Him, meditating on related Scripture truths, and being silent in His presence. During this time, I recalled my two-pronged theme. Then I was struck by God’s great LOVE in His gifts of both His promises and His commands so we could live blessed by Him. Then I realized for the first time ever, in the words of the Westminster catechism, He gave us gifts so we will enjoy Him forever.

Now I realized my two-pronged theme of how God relates to people was stuck on the horizontal, earthly level. I realized that the promises and commands flowed from God in heaven to people on earth because in His LOVE God desires to bless people. As I

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Inside this issue:

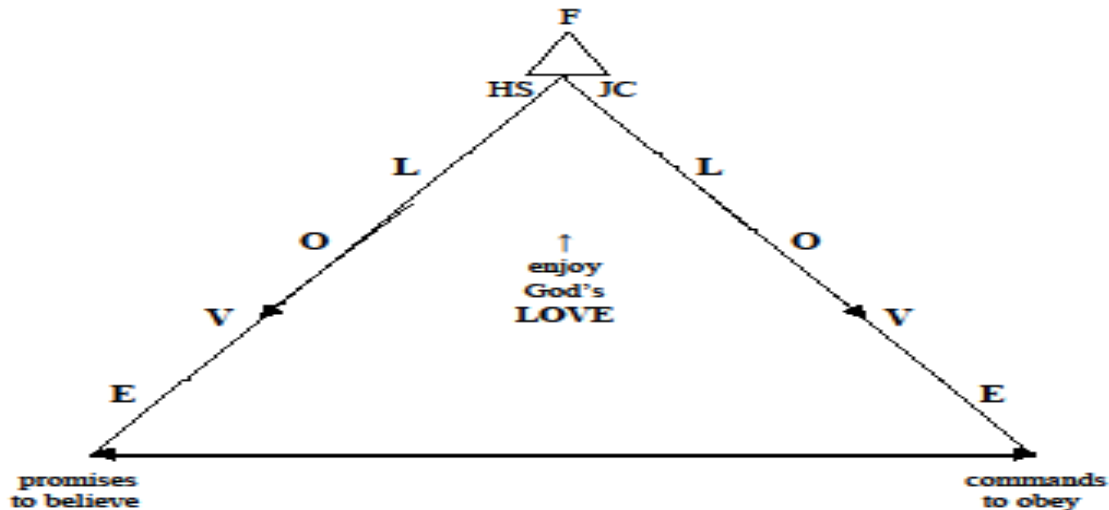
<i>A Three-Fold Relationship with the Triune God</i>	1
<i>Our Constant Companion — The Holy Spirit</i>	2
<i>Resurrection ... “It is Finished” ... Reflections</i>	3
<i>October Vestry Voices Newsletter</i>	5
<i>September 2020 Calendar of Events</i>	6



A Three-Fold Relationship ... (... continued from page #1)

lifted my eyes and heart vertically to God, I was filled with gratitude for His LOVE. At that moment I was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit as I realized my earthbound straight line was now a triangle with the Three-in-One God at the top point. Now I had a three-fold theme of God from the Bible: In His great LOVE, God has given to people promises to believe and commands to obey, so they may enjoy His great LOVE.

In diagram form it looks like this:



Even those who are suffering can rejoice in the LOVE of God and have hope. Jeremiah was devastated when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and the small remnant of people who survived was carried away to Babylon. In his song of lament he asked God to remember his bitterness and said his hope was in the steadfast LOVE of Yahweh which never comes to an end! (*Lamentations 3:1-33, especially verses 19-23*) Picking up on this theme, Peter commanded Christians scattered far from home because of persecution to rejoice as they share in Christ's sufferings because the Spirit of God (whose fruit is God's LOVE) will rest on them. (*1 Peter 4:12-14; Galatians 5:22-23*)

Enjoying God's LOVE includes joy in His creation and joy in human relationships. But, more than this, it is joy in His presence. It was during an hour of openness to His Spirit in my car that God gave me the insight of rejoicing in Him and His LOVE.

All of this begins and ends with God. Those who know God, through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, will find their obedience to Jesus Christ by faith in the inspired Word, yields great joy in God's LOVE!

My prayer is that everyone who reads this article will gain a deeper understanding of God's amazing, life-giving, life changing LOVE. In His LOVE, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, has given us promises to believe and commands to obey. He gave these SO we may all live in humble, dependent, obedient faith in the promises given by the Holy Spirit – doing all Jesus commanded. The result of living a God-centered life of faithful obedience will be great joy in God's LOVE – in all circumstances, always and forever.

Our Constant Companion — The Holy Spirit

By Cindy Nieves

Believers in Jesus can rejoice in knowing we are never alone. Our constant and forever companion is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit of God is given to every follower of Christ, by our Heavenly Father, to "help you and be with you forever." (John 14:16). The Spirit was promised to us by Jesus to be our personal guide and counselor. The flame of the Holy Spirit lives in us to light our path until we meet Jesus, face to face.

The Holy Spirit is our divine companion and our comforter. He is completely dependable, fully available, and totally reliable. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit has come to be with us, to be in us, and to fill us. When you allow the Lord to be in control of your life and to be the One guiding you every minute of the day, that is being "full of the Spirit." When the Holy Spirit fills us, we will sense the Spirit prompting and speaking to us in many differ- (continued, page 3 ...)



Our Constant Companion ... (... continued from page #2)

ent ways. It might be by bringing a particular Scripture verse to our mind, or bringing an image or idea to our thoughts, or perhaps He will put a mission or errand on our heart. Or sometimes a hymn will come to our mind or maybe He will reveal to us that someone needs prayer. These are all promptings of the Spirit.

The goal is to walk in the fullness of the Spirit, led by Him in every way. Let Him control and guide your life and this will enable you to overcome problems, conquer your sin, find guidance in each decision, and most importantly, make an impact around you for the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit reaches out to us in compassion and love. He even pursued us when we walked according to our way. But He won us over to follow God's divine purpose; He brought us into the light of God's truth.

The Holy Spirit will give us great boldness when we need it to accomplish a task for God's glory and will fully equip us for what God has prepared for us.

The Holy Spirit is God's living presence in our lives. He can lead us, teach us, empower us, and transform us. (John 14:26). When we have faith, the Holy Spirit renews us and changes our lives. He also enlightens us by revealing answers that may have been previously hidden. For example, Bible verses may acquire a new meaning and depth. I have often heard Pastor Gary say that he found a new or different interpretation of a Bible passage he read. Most of us have probably experienced the same thing. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He opens our eyes to what God is trying to teach us.

The Holy Spirit inspires us to accomplish far more than we ever thought we could. He helps us to follow Jesus and to become more holy. The Holy Spirit helps us to be more powerful witnesses for Christ. He even helps us pray when our own words fail us. (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit helps us in our spiritual growth and strengthens believers – "... and God will strengthen you with power through His

Spirit within you." (Ephesians 3:16). We cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we know through faith and the promise of Jesus Christ that He is there.

As believers, our task is to become aware of the movement and voice of the Spirit inside of us. As it states in 1 Cor. 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have received from God?" The Holy Spirit is like a river; He moves us one way and then another, according to God's will and purpose for our life.

Galatians 5:25 tells us, "Since we live in the Holy Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." That simply means that as we walk along in our Christian lives, we are to follow the Spirit's lead. We are to be in harmony with Him. If we get out of step or stray off the right path, the result will be devastating. Living by the promptings and power of the Spirit within us is the key to avoiding sinful ways and habits.

How can we tell if we are walking in step with the Holy Spirit? Paul spelled it out clearly in Galatians 5:16-26, which basically says we shall not be guilty of the practices mentioned in verses 19 through 21 (impurity, hatred, rage, envy, etc.). Rather the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – will be clearly evident in our lives (Galatians 5:22, 23). We must share the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit through words and deeds. Life in the Holy Spirit is one of righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17).

Prayer:

O Holy Spirit, I want to be open to Your empowering presence. Make my heart Your home, I pray.

Silence my senses and quiet any distractions so that I may only be tuned in to Your transforming presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Resurrection ... "It is Finished" ... Reflections

by Petros

"When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, '*It is Finished!*' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." (John 19:30). His suffering was over. Jesus had made the way for us. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15). When the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. The resurrected Jesus

came up and spoke to them, saying "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19).

I remember when I first realized the Great Commission was given to all believers. As a "newbie," I reasoned that I could share the love of God as a (continued on page 4 ...)

Resurrection ... "It is Finished" ... (... continued from page #3)

follower of Christ. But to baptize in the three persons of our Heavenly Father – I didn't feel qualified. I hoped obeying one out of two commissions would be acceptable. But God who has started a good work in me will see it to completion. Jesus lets his disciples know that "All authority has been given to Me (to Him and thereby imparted to us) in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18). Authority is the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior (Merriam-Webster.com). In order to make disciples of all nations, it would be fair to say one should have an understanding of what a disciple means.

In 2018, I wrote ... It is imperative to realize and live in the Kingdom of Heaven before beginning our discipleship. Repent and believe to receive the power of the Holy Spirit who reveals secrets of the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven. How he gives us the keys to heaven. How to live in the Kingdom of God – having Heaven on earth. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25). Quality time spent with God and His Word will give an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Are you prepared to go before our Savior and "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 3:2). To repent is to turn 180° from our self-centered ways that lead to the desires of our flesh. God wants you to rise above man's creation and live in his Kingdom.

Prepare as Isaiah proclaimed and as John the Baptist would quote, "... Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." (Mark 1:3). John's baptism by water is an outward sign of commitment. To be baptized, a person must be prepared. The person has discovered the love of God and has decided to make straight paths to God. The realization of sin leads to a whole hearted repenting of the self-centered ways that lead to lying, cheating, stealing, etc. to satisfy our fleshly desires. Baptism by water is an action representing our commitment to turn away from our sinful nature. Modeling John's baptizing by immersion of the whole body is symbolic of burying the sinful nature; death to the old ways and rising as a new child of God's family. John the Baptist proclaimed, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11).

"Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them ..." (Acts 19:4-6). To baptize in the name of Jesus, the forgiveness of God and a repenting heart enables the Holy Spirit to descend. Symbolic

of "all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3-4). Baptism unites a believer with Jesus in His death to sin and resurrection to a new life in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. We are forgiven by God when we accept the sacrifice of Jesus (on the cross) for salvation for all who turn from their ways. People should see a changed person as the work of the Holy Spirit commences – a reflection of Jesus. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2).

So, living in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is living by the Word and power of the Holy Spirit. Quality and prayer time with God will equip and prepare us to "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." (Luke 10:3). "... Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20). As disciples, by the authority in Jesus, we are commissioned to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 10, Jesus warns disciples of the lows and dangers of followers of Jesus. "You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22). "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:31-32). "... the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:26-27). Amen. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

I started this month's article to address the anxiety and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic; particularly, the media coverage of the plots, conspiracy and even predictions of the second coming. All said and done, ultimately, it is by God's Word and making the decision to focus our mind on his Kingdom on earth. There is no one solution for all because

(continued on page 5 ...)



Resurrection ... "It is Finished" ... (... continued from page #4)

God has a plan to reach all the nations by using his people. There is a path God has in store for each. And together there will be a time when all who have trained their minds to seek first the Kingdom and help others to avoid the temptations of this world. At that time we will see the sense of the trials we face. God's World is full of grace and mercy despite how others view it. Relying or being influenced by man-made remedies puts us in the middle of the mix. Following the

Master enables us to rise above the unknown and unto his protection and blessed reassurance. It is an easy choice to make, but we have to continually renew our thoughts to seek God. Otherwise, we were listed in the Book of Life but forgotten ...

Shalom.

October Vestry Voices Newsletter

Elin Lee, a regular contributor of articles to the Vestry Voices newsletter, will have TWO articles in the October issue. Thus, if you missed seeing an article from Elin this month, take heart! Her articles will return next month!



SEPTEMBER 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3 (**)	4	5
6 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	7	8	9	10 (**)	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 (**)	18	19
20 Communion Sunday (Note #2)	21	22	23	24 (**)	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 9/06 — Communion Sunday.
- #2) 9/20 — Communion Sunday.
- (**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **4:30 PM.**



Photo by Aleš Čerin from Freemages