

An Island ECC positional paper on:

The Holy Spirit

“What does the Island Evangelical Community Church believe about the Holy Spirit?”

In our doctrinal statement of faith we read, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God, who draws people to Christ and who lives in every person who has received Christ.” (John 16:8-9; Acts 2:38; Eph 1:13-14)

Our beliefs about the Holy Spirit, drawn from scripture, are summarized in the following description of the nature of the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son, of the same substance and equal in power and glory, is together with the Father and the Son, to be believed in, loved, obeyed, and worshipped throughout all ages.

Therefore, we believe the Holy Spirit to be God, just as we believe the Father and the Son to be God in the mystery of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit remains, however, the least understood of the three. God the Father has a title that helps us define him, and the Son took to himself a body like ours. But the Holy Spirit by name seems less comprehensible to us and is therefore subject to greater misunderstanding than either the Father or the Son. How, then, does Island ECC understand the Holy Spirit?

As previously stated, we understand him to be fully God. His primary function in this age is to glorify Christ by reconciling lost humanity to God. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is always willing to give to all who ask him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by his grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith.

The activity of the Holy Spirit accomplishes what Jesus declared to Nicodemus as the only means by which an individual is able to enter the kingdom of God, through the new birth. Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3-5).

In our redemption, the Holy Spirit accomplishes several things. He convicts us of sin and brings repentance. He enables us to believe, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. He seals the believer to the day of redemption. *“In him, you also, after listening to the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession to the praise of his glory.”* (Ephesians 1:13,14).

The Holy Spirit functions within the life of the believer, unfolding and expressing the life of Christ in ever deepening, life-changing ways. This is the process of sanctification by which the believer is enabled to grow in grace throughout his lifetime. Sanctification is never complete short of glorification. Some Christians believe that “the baptism in the Holy Spirit” is a second work of grace, subsequent to the new birth. What is the position of Island ECC in this matter?

We subscribe to the ancient affirmation of orthodox Christian faith and believe in *“one Lord, one faith, one baptism”* (Ephesians 4:5). This baptism, while visibly expressed in the covenant sacrament that bears its name is invisibly the work of the Spirit that takes place at the time of the new birth. Paul expresses this truth in 1 Corinthians 12:13, when he tells the Corinthians *“...we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body...”*

Thus, we hold to the concept of the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit as the act of the Spirit that takes an unregenerate individual and, through the new birth, adopts him into the family of God. All the works of the Spirit that follow, then, are because of this initial baptism rather than separate from it.

Since Christians are called to “...*be filled with the Spirit...*” (Ephesians 5:18), all believers in Christ having been baptised into his body by the Holy Spirit should seek to experience the fulfilment of this command. We believe that Christians are called upon to proclaim a grace that reaches out to forgive, to redeem and to give new spiritual power to life through Jesus Christ and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Regardless of what term is used, we recognize this deepening work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer as being both valid and necessary, producing evidences of his presence in the process. What do we believe to be these evidences of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer?

Some would require that Christians manifest a particular gift, such as speaking in tongues, as evidence of a deeper work of the Spirit within. Others would have us believe such a gift is no longer available or acceptable. We adhere strongly to our belief in the sovereignty of God, a belief that does not allow us either to require a certain gift or to restrict the Spirit in how he will work. Rather, we call upon all Christians to open their lives unto God’s Spirit to fill, empower and “gift” as he sees fit.

The Holy Spirit is evidenced, then, in part through the giving of spiritual gifts. Some of these gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and I Peter 4. Our position with regard to the gifts is best summarised in these questions.

Q. How does Island ECC view the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

A. Island ECC affirms the gifts of God’s Spirit as biblically valid for today, and counsels that they be exercised under the guidance of God’s Word and the authority of the Church. Since the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian unity, we must guard against any use of the gifts which would lead to division within the church. We also affirm the priority of the fruit of the Spirit over the gifts in the Christian life. Because of our affirming of the validity of spiritual gifts in the church today, we are sometimes asked if we are a “charismatic” church.

Q. Is Island ECC charismatic?

A. If you mean are we Pentecostal, the answer is no. If you mean are we open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the answer is yes. We believe that the word “charismatic” should not be limited to specific manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, but “charismatic” does refer to the fact that every Christian receives a gift, or gifts, from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7,11). In Romans 6:23, Paul states “...*the wages of sin is death, but the gift (charism) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” This means that all who are born again, receiving the gift of life in Jesus Christ, are by virtue of the gift “charismatic” in the broadest sense of the word (Ephesians 4:7).

What is the purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit? Obviously, it is to bring individuals to new life in Christ for their own sake, but it does not end there. When Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower his followers individually and the church corporately, which occurred on the day of Pentecost, he said that the Spirit’s power would have a particular purpose: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you shall be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:18)

Because of this primary function of the Holy Spirit to bring men and women to saving faith in Christ, Island ECC sees the evangelisation of the world as an urgent priority: “The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations.” (The Essentials of the Faith)

Basic to all we have said here is our conviction that all scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), and that he illumines our minds to understand the truths of God’s word (John 14:26; 16:13).

Q. In summary, what does Island ECC believe about the Holy Spirit?

1. We believe that the Holy Spirit is God, one with the Father and the Son.
2. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the inspirer of scripture and the enlightener of the believer.
3. We believe that the Holy Spirit’s primary function in this age is to bring lost humanity to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through new birth.
4. We believe that subsequent to new birth, and because of it, the Spirit manifests the life of Christ in the believer in a variety of ways that include both fruit and gifts.
5. We believe that the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the believer to enable God’s people to do what otherwise they could not do; namely, fulfil the Great Commission through missions and world evangelisation and build up the body of Christ on earth.

To these basic beliefs about the Holy Spirit we commit ourselves. We invite others of like mind and spirit to join us, to the end that on the day of his appearing, *“every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”*