Hi,

Today’s update:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Today’s email is the last in the series on the Holy Spirit. Paul heads back to Jerusalem, but not before one last meeting with the Spirit-filled leaders of the Christian community in Ephesus.

***Acts 20:17-38 (NRSV)***

**From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. When they came to him, he said to them:**

**“You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.**

**“And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”**

**When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.**

Each week, we come together and recite together the Apostles’ Creed, even in this on-line covid world. Ask yourself, what phrase immediately follows “I believe in the Holy Spirit”? . . . The next phrase in the creed generates more questions than any other: “. . . the holy catholic Church.” The word “catholic” is an old word that means “comprehensive” or “universal,” especially as it relates to the Christian Church. Our affirmation is simply that all those who have faith in Jesus Christ comprise a group that transcends all divisions of race, nationality, gender, age, and so on. We call this group the body of Christ or the Church (*ekklesia* in the Greek) or the universal/catholic Church. It is holy in that it has been formed by God and set apart to be his people, through whom God works to bring the Good News to all.

It is vitally important to grasp that the “holy, universal Church” is not simply a gathering of like-minded people who share common interests or a common goal. There are countless clubs and organizations that could be described in that way. The Church, in contrast, is a fellowship (*koinonia* in the Greek) created by God through Christ. God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, sustains, nurtures, and grows this fellowship. Indeed, Paul described the Church as the temple of God, the place where God dwells with his people as he had once dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Paul’s trinitarian benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 sums it up this way: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *koinonia* (fellowship/communion) of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” As Gordon Fee writes, “The community of God’s people owes their life together as a body to their common, lavish experience of the Spirit.” Why is there a St. Andrew? Because of the work of the Spirit.

*Paul’s third missionary journey*

The book of Acts is the story of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles and many others to create and grow the Church in the first decades after Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Yesterday, we learned how the Spirit led Paul westward into Macedonia and Greece on his second missionary journey. After spending “some time” in Jerusalem at the end of that journey, Paul headed out again on a third journey.

Paul’s route took him to Ephesus, then to Macedonia, and southward through Greece (Achaia). Paul was about to sail back home when he learned of a conspiracy against him. He decided to head back north to Macedonia, across to Troas, and south to Miletus. Paul had run into some trouble in Ephesus earlier on this journey, so he bypassed Ephesus for Miletus and asked the Christian leaders in Ephesus (there can’t have been many) to come to him for a meeting.

Paul’s talk with the Ephesian leaders (“elders” in the NRSV) is recounted for us in Acts 20:17-38, today’s Scripture passage. It is a frank and moving speech. Though made to some elders from the area of Ephesus, Paul’s speech is really to all whom he had spent many years teaching and leading. We can’t miss the parallels with Jesus’ last talks with his disciples. Like Jesus, Paul knows that the end has come, that “imprisonment and persecutions are waiting” for him (v. 24). How does he know that his return to Jerusalem will be the beginning of the end? Because the Holy Spirit has told him so (v.23)! The same Spirit who has guided, comforted, and strengthened Paul for more than twenty years, to whom he has been “captive” (v. 22) all this time, now directs him to Jerusalem, toward trouble, not away from it. Paul has seen much trouble before in his work for “the church of God, that he obtained with the blood of his own son” (v. 28). Given the spilling of Jesus’ blood, Paul is not surprised that his own would one day be spilt.

And just as Jesus promises his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to be with them, to be their Comforter and Advocate, so Paul reassures the leaders, telling them that “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God . . .” (v. 28). They are not leaders chosen by men and women, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. These leaders will be God’s shepherds, looking over God’s flock.

*The With-God Life*

Living with God does not come naturally to us. The “with-God” life is neither obvious nor easy. Indeed, much of our modern and post-modern culture strives for the “without-God” life, thinking that *we* can meet our deepest desires and needs ourselves.

But we cannot. As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it long ago, a life without God is nothing but vapor, with no lasting meaning or purpose.

Left to ourselves, such vapor would be all we have. But we are not in this alone. God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, empowers and comforts and encourages all those who have placed their faith in Christ. It is God who has made us, not we ourselves. And it is God who calls us to him and offers us the fulfillment we so desperately seek.

Our long-term neglect of the Holy Spirit, thinking of him as something akin to electricity or an energy drink has impoverished us. We say we want to be “spiritual” or pursue “spiritual growth,” but we imagine that we can do so if we just find the right program or the right guru – rather than acknowledging that it is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, whom we must embrace and allow to work with us and through us as we strive to be the people God has re-created us to be. There is no other way. This is God’s Way.

*A bit more -- God – personal and triune: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*

In a series on the Holy Spirit, discussion of our belief in a triune God is inescapable. Yet, without question, for many Christians the whole notion of the Trinity is one of the most perplexing and seemingly irrelevant Christian doctrines. Though we might affirm a statement something like this, “We believe in one God, who has always known himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” it can be pretty hard us to see that this makes much sense or that it makes much difference in our lives as Christians. Yet, our belief in a personal, triune God is foundational to all that makes Christianity unique among the world’s major religions. The more one comes to understand the whole story of God’s work to rescue his creation, the more one comes to understand that our belief in the Trinity underlies all things Christian.

Ask yourself this question: What do we know about God that we wouldn’t know without Jesus? Jesus said and did things that only God could say and do! Who was Jesus? Could he possibly be God himself? But how could this be if there is only one God? In the writings of the New Testament, we see that the first Christians came to understand that God had revealed, through Jesus, his deeper nature. Namely, that while there is unity in God – yes, there is one God -- there is also community, fellowship, and love in God’s very being.

In a letter, John wrote that, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (1John 4:16b) What do you think John meant by saying -- “God is love”? Did he mean that God loves more than anyone? that God loves without ceasing? or perhaps that God loves truly? All this is accurate, but it isn’t saying that God is love. After all, it seems almost nonsensical. Love must have an object. We love something or we love someone. How could any single person, in isolation, be love? However, when we proclaim that God is unity in three persons, then the statement that God is love makes perfect sense. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always been, are now, and always will be in loving relationship with one another. God is love because God is inherently relational. The loving relationships among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit form the basis of God’s very essence. The three persons of the Godhead live in eternal community, in a loving community of three persons. In himself, God is both lover and beloved.

What does this mean for us? The opening chapters of Genesis tell us that humans are made in God’s image. At a minimum, this means that we too are inherently relational; that we are made to live in loving relationship with one another. Indeed, living our lives in isolation diminishes the image of God within us. We are called to love God and neighbor, for God *is* love.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott