

## The Holy Spirit is Shy

A pastor once said in an adult Sunday School class that he had heard a speaker use this expression. It does point out a difference between Lutherans and others who, in one way or another depend upon some work or action here on earth for assurance of salvation. Evangelicals rely heavily upon a conversion experience for assurance of salvation. For those who do not believe in the Reformed doctrine of Preservation of the Saints (also called Eternal Security, or Once Save, Always Saved), their only assurance that they haven't left the faith with some sort of sin is a heavy reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as evidence that God hasn't left them. They usually call this "A personal relationship with Christ". Reformed church members who do believe in the Preservation of the Saints possibly do not place as much weight on this method, but falling into some type of outward sin will call into question their conversion and can also lead to this method being used.

Lutherans receive their assurance from the message of the cross, conveyed through the word and the sacraments, and do not rely on the work of the Holy Spirit for assurance of salvation, though they recognize His work in us will provide some indicators that we are children of God.

Those who need to understand the Spirit's work as being extroverted to prop up their doctrines and practices of assurance of salvation will point to a pattern that occurred in the Bible. They say that in the Old Testament, God the Father was central. In the gospels, Jesus is central. They say in the book of Acts and beyond, the Holy Spirit, or at least his work, is to be the focus. They point to the miracles and spiritual gifts demonstrated in the New Testament as evidence of that extroversion.

However, the Spirit chose the guise of a dove to descend upon Jesus at his baptism. That would certainly indicate that he is a quiet, gentle being. The term "spirit" chosen also means wind, air or breath, indicating invisibility or shyness. Jesus said that the Spirit would take what was His (Jesus') and make it known to his disciples.

Certainly, the Holy Spirit did work in an open and outwardly visible fashion in the book of Acts. Jesus had left his followers and had gone to heaven. They needed immediate assurance that he was continuing to watch over them. This has since been made even more powerfully demonstrated by the writing of the new testament, an error free book which is the word of God and the spread of the gospel and the presence of believers in all parts of the world, even under very difficult circumstances but usually without the outward signs of the book of Acts. But the Spirit's demeanor and work are usually quiet, gentle, loving, and shy.

A person may openly resist a show of force, even the Heavenly Father's discipline, yet still leave us hope that he can be reached someday with the gospel. But, when the Spirit's gentle, loving, sweet, quiet reminders of Jesus' sacrifice for us are resisted, that is scary.

Due to sin, our ability to detect the Spirit's work is very weak, even in the best of us, and we should neither use it to try to judge a person's standing before God, nor to form the basis of our own assurance of salvation. We have the Bible's word that the Spirit began his work in us at baptism, and by remembering our baptism he reassures us of our salvation.

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