

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

PNEUMATOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

UNIT 4: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Lesson 9

The Spirit and the Life of Jesus

Incarnation, Baptism, Ministry, and Atonement

Jesus as the Model of Spirit-Empowered Obedience

Key Texts: Luke 1:35; Matthew 3:16–17; Luke 4:1, 14, 18–19; Matthew 12:28; Hebrews 9:14

“The Spirit of the Lord Is upon Me, Because He Anointed Me”

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Series Verse

*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes,
He will guide you into all the truth;
for He will not speak on His own initiative,
but whatever He hears, He will speak;
and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

John 16:13, NASB 1995

Introduction

With Lesson 9 we cross into Unit 4, the most Christologically intense and theologically dense unit of this entire series. We have traced the Spirit's work from the hovering over the primordial waters (Lesson 6), through the selective empowerments of Israel's leaders and prophets (Lesson 7), to the great New Covenant promises that anticipated a universal and permanent outpouring (Lesson 8). Now we come to the center of all pneumatological history: the Spirit's relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The relationship between the Spirit and the Son is not secondary or incidental to the doctrine of the Spirit. It is, rather, the decisive pneumatological event in the history of redemption, the moment when the Old Testament's promises of a Spirit-anointed Messiah find their fulfillment in a specific Person, and when the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Son (Lesson 5) finds its most concentrated temporal expression. The Spirit who had come upon Moses and David and Isaiah for specific tasks now rests upon the Son of God made flesh, not for a task, not temporarily, not withdrawably, but as the permanent, constitutive, life-sustaining presence of the Third Person upon and within the Second Person in His humanity.

This lesson covers the Spirit's role in the entire arc of Jesus' earthly life and ministry: the miraculous conception in the Virgin Mary's womb, the growth of the child Jesus in wisdom and in grace, the public inauguration of His messianic ministry at His baptism, the forty-day testing in the wilderness, the Spirit-empowered teaching and healing ministry of the Galilean mission, and the supreme pneumatological act of Christ's earthly life: the offering of Himself upon the cross through the eternal Spirit. Each of these moments is pneumatologically significant, and together they constitute a portrait of what the Spirit-empowered human life looks like when lived in perfect obedience, the portrait of the one Man who was, from conception to resurrection, exactly who the Spirit intended every human being to become.

There is also a profound theological significance to this lesson that extends beyond biographical interest in the Spirit's role in Jesus' life. Jesus' manner of living as the Spirit-anointed Messiah is the normative model for the church's Spirit-empowered life and mission. As the Father anointed the Son with the Spirit for the work of redemption, so the Son anoints the church with the Spirit for the work of mission. As Christ was led by the Spirit through temptation and testing to faithfulness, so the Spirit leads the believer through the trials of the Christian life toward conformity to Christ. As Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit, so the believer's life of sacrifice and worship is offered through the enabling of the same Spirit. The pneumatology of Christ's life is not a historical curiosity; it is the Christological pattern from which all ecclesial and personal pneumatology derives.

I. The Spirit and the Incarnation

Luke 1:35, The Spirit as the Agent of the Virgin Conception

A. The Angelic Announcement and Its Pneumatological Claim

The pneumatological dimension of the incarnation is announced with economy and precision in Luke 1:35, in Gabriel's response to Mary's question, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?": "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (NASB 1995). The angelic announcement identifies the Holy Spirit as the agent of the miraculous conception: it is not a natural biological process, not a divine fiat that bypasses the ordinary conditions of creaturely existence, but the Holy Spirit's creative and life-giving work within the womb of the Virgin Mary that brings the eternal Son of God into embodied human existence.

Two features of the announcement demand attention. First, the verb "come upon" (eperchomai), the same verb used in Acts 1:8 for the Spirit's coming upon the disciples at Pentecost ("when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"), establishes the incarnation as a pneumatological event of the same divine creative category as Pentecost. The Spirit's creative power, exercised in the womb of Mary, is the personal act of the One who hovered over the primordial waters and who would later be poured out on all flesh. Second, the verb "overshadow" (episkiazō) deliberately evokes the shekinah cloud that overshadowed the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35) and the divine presence that overshadowed the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:34). The incarnation is the supreme divine tabernacling: the One whose presence filled the tabernacle now takes up His dwelling not in a tent of meeting but in a womb of flesh.

The theological significance of Luke 1:35 for Christology is immense and requires careful handling. The verse does not teach that the Spirit is the father of Jesus in any sense that replaces the eternal Fatherhood of God the Father. Jesus' conception is virginal, without a human father, and the Spirit's role is that of the creative Agent who effects the miraculous conception, not that of the biological progenitor. The Son who becomes incarnate is the eternal Son of the Father; the Spirit's work in the incarnation is the execution of the Father's eternal purpose to send the Son (Galatians 4:4) through the Spirit's creative power. The incarnation is, from first to last, a Trinitarian event: the Father sends, the Spirit conceives, the Son is conceived and born.

B. Theological Implications of the Spirit-Conceived Incarnation

The pneumatological character of the incarnation has two far-reaching theological implications. The first concerns the nature of Christ's humanity. The incarnate Son does not take up a fallen human nature corrupted by sin; He takes up a genuine, complete human nature that is, from its very conception, holy and without sin, "the holy Child" (Luke 1:35). This holiness of the incarnate nature is not Jesus' divinity preventing the contamination of human sinfulness; it is the Spirit's creative, sanctifying work in the conception ensuring that the human nature taken up by the eternal Son is an unstained human nature. The Spirit who sanctifies the believer's

nature progressively over the course of the Christian life sanctified the human nature of the Son completely and instantaneously in the act of conception.

The second implication concerns the relationship between the incarnation and the Spirit's subsequent ministry to Christ. If the Spirit's creative work constitutes the humanity of the incarnate Son from its very beginning, then the Spirit's continuing presence with and in Jesus throughout His earthly life is not an external addition to an already complete human existence but the continuation of the same Spirit-humanity relationship that began in the womb. The Spirit who conceives Jesus is the Spirit who grows with Jesus, who descends upon Jesus at baptism, who leads Jesus into the wilderness, and who empowers Jesus' ministry. There is a profound continuity between the pneumatological moment of incarnation and the pneumatological texture of the entire incarnate life that follows.

II. The Spirit and the Growth of Jesus

Luke 2:40, 52, The Spirit's Role in Christ's Human Development

One of the most theologically demanding aspects of a fully developed Christological pneumatology is the question of the Spirit's role in the development of Jesus' human nature during His childhood and adolescence. The Gospel of Luke provides two brief but theologically pregnant statements: "The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40, NASB 1995) and "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52, NASB 1995). Both statements affirm a genuine developmental progression in the human nature of the incarnate Son: He grew, He increased, He advanced. These are not metaphors; they are statements about the real human development of the Second Person of the Trinity in His incarnate state.

The Christological difficulty is this: how can the eternal, omniscient Son of God grow in wisdom? The answer lies in the distinction between the two natures of Christ, a distinction that the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD) articulated with precision and that the Christology series has covered in detail. The Son is fully divine in His divine nature, possessing all divine attributes without limitation, including omniscience. He is also fully human in His human nature, possessing all human attributes without sin, including the capacity for intellectual and moral development. His growth in wisdom is the growth of His human mind, His human intellectual and experiential faculties, in their authentic human mode of development. It is not a growth in the divine nature, which is immutable and cannot increase, but a growth in the human nature that the eternal Son has taken as His own.

The Spirit's role in this growth is analogous to His role in the growth of any human being who is the bearer of the image of God: He is the source of wisdom, the illuminator of the mind, the enabler of the faculties through which the human creature grows in understanding. But in the case of Jesus, this Spirit-mediated human development is uniquely perfect: there is no sin to distort the Spirit's illuminating work, no rebellion to resist His leading, no pride to corrupt the genuine reception of wisdom. The child Jesus grows in wisdom not by overriding His human limitations but by genuinely exercising His human faculties in perfect dependence on the Spirit

who has been with Him since conception. His is the human development that unfallen Adam might have known, unimpeded, undistorted, genuinely progressive, and entirely Spirit-enabled.

III. The Spirit and the Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:16–17, The Trinitarian Inauguration of the Messianic Mission

A. The Event and Its Pneumatological Significance

The baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River is one of the most pneumatologically and Christologically dense events in the entire Gospel narrative, and Matthew's account captures its essential structure with characteristic economy: "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'" (Matthew 3:16–17, NASB 1995). The event is transparently Trinitarian: the Son comes up from the water, the Spirit descends upon Him, the Father speaks His pleasure. Each Person of the Holy Trinity participates in a single redemptive-historical event of inaugural and defining significance.

The pneumatological significance of the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism has been debated across the centuries of Christological reflection, and it is important to navigate the question with care. The descent is not the first moment of the Spirit's presence with Jesus, the Spirit has been with Him since conception (Luke 1:35) and throughout His development (Luke 2:40, 52). It is not the moment at which Jesus becomes the Son of God, He is the eternal Son from before all ages (John 1:1–2; Colossians 1:15–17). The two heresies that the baptism narrative must not be read to support are adoptionism (the view that Jesus became the Son of God at baptism, when the divine Spirit took up His dwelling in the man Jesus) and kenoticism (the view that the Spirit's descent at baptism makes up for divine capacities that the Son emptied Himself of at the incarnation). Both misread the narrative by failing to distinguish between what the Son is by eternal nature and what He is equipped for by the Spirit's public anointing in the history of redemption.

What the Spirit's descent at baptism does signify is the public, Trinitarian inauguration of the Messiah's redemptive mission, the official commencement of the ministry of the Spirit-anointed Servant of Isaiah 42:1: "Behold, My servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon him." The Father's declaration ("This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased") is the divine authentication; the Spirit's descent is the messianic anointing; and the Son's coming up from the waters is the readiness of the anointed One for the mission that will lead through wilderness testing, Galilean ministry, and ultimately to Calvary. The Jordan is the pneumatological inauguration of the way of the cross.

B. The Dove and the Nature of the Anointing

The image of the Spirit descending "as a dove" (*hōs peristerān*) has been the subject of considerable interpretive attention. All four Gospels use this simile, and John's Gospel (1:32) reports that the Spirit "descended as a dove out of heaven, and He remained (*emeinen*) upon

Him”, the verb “remained” being the significant pneumatological detail. The dove image has been variously interpreted as suggesting gentleness, peace (the dove of the Noahic narrative), divine Wisdom (in rabbinic tradition), and the Spirit’s mode of descent. But the detail that the Spirit “remained” upon Jesus is theologically decisive: this is not the temporary, selective, task-specific coming upon of the Old Covenant’s charismatic empowerments. The Spirit descends and remains, a permanent, abiding, messianic anointing that distinguishes Jesus’ Spirit-experience from every Old Covenant Spirit-empowerment and anticipates the New Covenant’s permanent indwelling.

John the Baptist confirms the pneumatological significance of the remaining with his own testimony: “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’” (John 1:32–33, NASB 1995). The One upon whom the Spirit remains is the One who will baptize in the Spirit, the One who, because He possesses the Spirit permanently and without limit, can pour the Spirit out upon those who believe in Him. Jesus’ permanent possession of the Spirit is the pneumatological ground of His subsequent gift of the Spirit to His people at Pentecost.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” | “The Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him” | “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him”

Luke 1:35; Matthew 3:16; John 1:33, NASB 1995

IV. The Spirit in the Wilderness and the Galilean Ministry

Led by the Spirit, Empowered by the Spirit

A. Luke 4:1, Led by the Spirit into Temptation

Immediately following the Trinitarian inauguration of His ministry at the Jordan, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness for the forty days of testing. Luke’s account is pneumatologically precise: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1–2, NASB 1995). The Spirit who has just descended upon Jesus now leads Him into the most severe testing of His earthly life, not as a punishment or an oversight but as a deliberate divine action. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness because the wilderness testing is a necessary dimension of His messianic mission: He must be proven in the fire of Satanic temptation before He can be the proven Savior of those who face temptation.

The pneumatological character of the temptation narrative is crucial for understanding Jesus as the Second Adam and the model of Spirit-empowered obedience. The first Adam faced temptation in a garden, well-fed and without prior suffering, and failed. The Second Adam faces

temptation in a wilderness, after forty days of fasting, in the most extreme conditions of physical and spiritual deprivation, and overcomes. The mechanism of the Second Adam's victory is not His divine nature bypassing His human limitations; it is His Spirit-filled human nature, sustained by the Spirit who leads Him and abides with Him through the forty days, clinging to the Word of God with the unbreakable fidelity that the first Adam had abandoned. Every one of Jesus' responses to Satan's temptations is a word of Scripture, the Spirit's sword (Ephesians 6:17) wielded by the Spirit-filled Son against the adversary of the human race.

The outcome of the wilderness testing is pneumatologically declared in Luke 4:14: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." He had entered the wilderness "full of the Holy Spirit" (v. 1); He emerged from it "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14). The testing has not diminished the Spirit's presence or the Spirit's empowerment; if anything, it has forged the Spirit-filled humanity of the Son into the instrument of redemption that the mission requires. The power that flows from Jesus' Galilean ministry is the power of the Spirit who has been with Jesus through the deepest testing and who now animates every aspect of the public mission: teaching, healing, exorcism, and proclamation.

B. Luke 4:18–19, The Nazareth Manifesto: The Spirit's Anointing Announced

The first public act of Jesus' Galilean ministry, as Luke narrates it, is the reading of Isaiah 61:1–2 in the synagogue at Nazareth and the shocking declaration that follows: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19, NASB 1995, citing Isaiah 61:1–2). Jesus then rolls up the scroll, sits down, and says: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

The pneumatological claim of this declaration is definitive and comprehensive. Jesus identifies the Spirit's anointing as the ground of every dimension of His mission: the preaching of the gospel, the proclamation of release to captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, the liberation of the oppressed, and the announcement of the year of the Lord's favor. Everything He is about to do, the entire arc of His public ministry, is grounded in and empowered by the Spirit's anointing. He does not proceed on the basis of His divine authority alone, bypassing the creaturely conditions of His incarnate state; He proceeds as the Spirit-anointed Messiah, the fulfillment of Isaiah's great pneumatological prophecy, whose entire messianic work is the Spirit's work through the Messiah's obedient humanity.

The Isaiah 61:1–2 declaration also provides the pneumatological taxonomy of Christ's mission: it is a mission to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. These categories are not merely sociological descriptions; they are theological designations for those whom sin has impoverished, imprisoned, blinded, and enslaved. The Spirit's anointing upon Jesus is the divine empowerment to address these conditions in their deepest spiritual dimension: to preach the gospel that restores the spiritually poor, to proclaim the liberty that releases from sin's bondage, to open the eyes of those blinded to the truth, and to bring the year of divine favor, the era of New Covenant grace, to all who will receive it.

V. The Spirit in Christ's Ministry of Power

Matthew 12:28, Casting Out Demons by the Spirit of God

Among the most direct pneumatological statements in the Synoptic Gospels is Matthew 12:28, where Jesus explains the power by which He has cast out demons: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (NASB 1995). The statement is made in the context of the Pharisees' blasphemous attribution of Jesus' exorcistic power to Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons (v. 24). Jesus refutes their argument (if Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom is divided), and then makes the positive claim: His exorcistic power is the power of the Spirit of God, and the presence of that power is the evidence that the kingdom of God has arrived.

The pneumatological significance of Matthew 12:28 operates on multiple levels. First, it establishes that Jesus' miraculous ministry is not conducted on the basis of His divine omnipotence directly bypassing the conditions of His incarnate human state; it is conducted through the Spirit's empowerment of His incarnate humanity. This is not to diminish the divine character of Jesus' miracles, the Spirit through whom He casts out demons is fully God, and therefore the act is fully divine. But it is to affirm that the mechanism of the miraculous in Jesus' ministry is the same mechanism that will operate in the apostolic ministry after Pentecost: the Spirit's empowerment of obedient, Spirit-filled human instrumentality.

Second, and theologically more significant: the connection between the Spirit's presence and the kingdom's arrival is among the most important pneumatological-eschatological statements in the entire New Testament. Where the Spirit operates in His full New Covenant power, the kingdom of God is present. The Spirit is not merely the empowering resource for kingdom work; He is the constitutive presence of the kingdom itself. To be in the Spirit is to be in the kingdom. To receive the Spirit is to enter the kingdom. And Jesus' Spirit-empowered ministry of exorcism, healing, and proclamation is the kingdom of God breaking into the world of sin, death, and Satanic dominion through the anointed instrumentality of the Spirit-filled Messiah.

The parallel in Luke 11:20, which uses "finger of God" rather than "Spirit of God", further illumines the pneumatological dimension of this statement. The "finger of God" is the Old Testament's image of direct divine action (Exodus 8:19; 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10). Luke's substitution of "finger of God" for Matthew's "Spirit of God" is not a contradiction but a complementary interpretation: the Spirit of God is the finger of God, the direct, personal, executive power of the Triune God at work in and through the incarnate Son. Jesus' Spirit-empowered ministry is the power of God Himself, exercised through the Spirit upon the incarnate human nature of the eternal Son.

VI. The Spirit and the Atonement

Hebrews 9:14, Offered Through the Eternal Spirit

The most pneumatologically profound statement about the Spirit's role in the life of Christ is one of the most easily overlooked: Hebrews 9:14, which describes the mechanism of Christ's self-offering on the cross. In the context of a sustained argument for the superiority of Christ's

high priestly sacrifice over the Levitical system, the author writes: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (NASB 1995).

The phrase “through the eternal Spirit” (*diā pneumatos aiōniou*) is pneumatologically decisive. The preposition *dia* (through) indicates instrumentality or mediation: it is through the Spirit that Christ offers Himself. The cross, which is the pneumatological culmination of everything the Spirit has been doing in and with Jesus from the moment of conception, is here presented as a Spirit-mediated act of priestly self-offering. The eternal Son, in His incarnate humanity, offers Himself as the unblemished sacrifice to the Father, and the Spirit is the divine Agent who mediates this offering. This does not mean that the Spirit is the mechanism of the atonement in the sense that the Spirit’s power provides the energy for the cross; it means that the obedient, faithful, willing self-offering of the incarnate Son on the cross is sustained, enabled, and presented to the Father by the eternal Spirit.

The implications of this verse for a full understanding of the atonement are profound and far-reaching. The atonement is not the Son’s unilateral act, performed without reference to the Spirit; it is a Trinitarian act in which the Father accepts the sacrifice, the Son offers Himself, and the Spirit mediates the offering. The cross is not merely the place where the Son pays the penalty of sin, though it is certainly that, in the fullest forensic sense; it is the place where the eternal Trinitarian love, the Father’s sending, the Son’s obedience, the Spirit’s enabling, reaches its most concentrated and most costly expression. The Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation, who brooded over Israel’s history, who conceived the Son in Mary’s womb, who rested permanently upon Jesus at the Jordan, who led Him through the wilderness and empowered His ministry, this same eternal Spirit is present at Calvary, mediating the supreme act of Christ’s obedient self-offering to the Father.

The practical implication of Hebrews 9:14 is equally significant. If Christ offered Himself “without blemish” through the eternal Spirit, then the blameless character of the offering is, in part, a pneumatological achievement: it is the Spirit’s presence with and in Jesus that maintains His perfect obedience through the agony of Gethsemane and the horror of the cross, that prevents the abandonment of the mission that Satan had proposed in the wilderness and that human fear might have suggested in the garden. The same Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness is the Spirit through whom Jesus, in the ultimate test of His obedience, offers Himself without blemish, completing the mission of redemption that the Father had given Him to accomplish.

VII. The Theological Significance: Jesus as the Model of Spirit-Empowered Obedience

The Christological Pattern for the Believer’s Pneumatological Life

The survey of the Spirit’s presence throughout the life of Jesus, from the miraculous conception to the self-offering of the cross, yields a theological principle of the highest importance for the Christian life: Jesus’ human life and ministry were lived in conscious, moment-by-moment

dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is not merely the giver of the Spirit to the church; He is the supreme exemplar of Spirit-empowered human existence. The entire arc of His earthly life, conceived by the Spirit, grown in Spirit-mediated wisdom, anointed by the Spirit at baptism, led by the Spirit through temptation, empowered by the Spirit in ministry, and offering Himself through the eternal Spirit, is the normative pattern of what it looks like for a human being to live in perfect dependence on and responsiveness to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

The pneumatological significance of Jesus as the model is not that believers are called to imitate an impossible standard of perfect human sinlessness. It is that the Spirit-dependence which characterized Jesus' entire human existence is the same Spirit-dependence to which every believer is called and for which every believer has been equipped by the same Spirit. Romans 8:29 declares that believers are predestined "to become conformed to the image of His Son." The image to which they are being conformed is, among other things, the image of the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered Son of Man. When Paul commands believers to be "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16), to be "led by the Spirit" (Romans 8:14), and to "pray in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18), he is calling them to a form of pneumatological existence that is modeled on and made possible by the Spirit's work in the life of the Son Himself.

The Christological pattern for the believer's pneumatological life can be summarized in three corresponding pairs. First, as Christ was Spirit-conceived and brought into spiritual existence by the Spirit's creative work, so the believer is Spirit-regenerated and brought into new spiritual existence by the Spirit's creative work (John 3:5–8). Second, as Christ was Spirit-anointed for the mission of redemption, so the church is Spirit-anointed for the mission of witness (Acts 1:8; 1 John 2:27). Third, as Christ was Spirit-led through temptation and testing to faithful obedience, so the believer is Spirit-led through the trials of the Christian life toward conformity to Christ (Romans 8:13–14; Galatians 5:16–18). The Spirit who empowered the Head now empowers the body; the pneumatological pattern of Christ's life is the template for the pneumatological life of every member of His church.

There is one crucial asymmetry in this correspondence that must not be overlooked. Jesus' Spirit-dependence was the Spirit-dependence of the sinless, eternal Son of God in His incarnate humanity. His dependence produced perfect obedience, unbroken fellowship with the Father, and the unblemished self-offering that makes atonement. The believer's Spirit-dependence is the Spirit-dependence of a redeemed sinner who is being progressively sanctified, whose obedience is real but imperfect, whose fellowship with the Father is genuine but interrupted by sin, and whose self-offering is accepted not on the basis of its own worthiness but on the basis of the atonement that Christ's perfect Spirit-empowered obedience accomplished. The Christological pattern is the normative model; it is not an identity claim. The believer's Spirit-empowered life is a participation in the pattern of Christ's Spirit-empowered life, mediated through union with Christ and applied through the Spirit's sanctifying work.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

*because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives.”*

Luke 4:18, NASB 1995 (cf. Isaiah 61:1)

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Virginal Conception	The miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary without a human father, accomplished by the creative act of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The virginal conception (often called the Virgin Birth, though the term more properly refers to the manner of birth) is both a Christological and pneumatological affirmation: Christological, because it establishes the unique personal identity of the incarnate Son as the eternal Son of God taking human nature; pneumatological, because it identifies the Holy Spirit as the creative Agent of the incarnation. The Nicene Creed confesses that the Son was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.”
Adoptionism	The heretical teaching, condemned by the early church, that Jesus was a merely human person who was adopted as the Son of God at a specific moment in His earthly life, typically His baptism. Adoptionism misreads the descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism as the moment at which Jesus became divine or was elevated to divine status. The correct reading, affirmed by orthodox Christology, is that the Spirit’s descent at the Jordan publicly inaugurated the Spirit-anointed Messiah’s redemptive mission, not that it constituted His Sonship. The Son is eternally the Son; the anointing is a redemptive-historical public act, not an ontological constitution.
Messianic Anointing	The Spirit’s public anointing of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah, “the Anointed One”) at His baptism (Matthew 3:16–17), fulfilling the Old Testament’s pneumatological anticipation of the Spirit-anointed Servant (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1). The messianic anointing is not the beginning of the Spirit’s presence with Jesus (which dates from the conception) but the public inauguration of His messianic mission before God and the nation. It is the pneumatological authentication of His role as the Christ, the One who receives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34) and who will baptize others in the same Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:33).
Remaining of the Spirit	The pneumatologically decisive detail in John 1:32–33 that the Spirit “remained” (emenōn) upon Jesus at His baptism. Whereas the Old Covenant’s Spirit-empowerments were temporary, selective, and task-specific, the Spirit came for a purpose and the narrative implies no permanent indwelling, the Spirit’s remaining upon Jesus marks His Spirit-experience as qualitatively different: permanent, comprehensive, and constitutive of His entire messianic mission. John the Baptist explicitly connects this remaining with Jesus’ authority to baptize others in the Spirit (John 1:33), establishing that Jesus’ permanent possession of the Spirit is the ground of His ability to pour out the Spirit upon those who believe in Him.

Term	Definition
Spirit-Empowered Obedience	The pattern of Jesus' human life and ministry as lived in conscious, moment-by-moment dependence on the Holy Spirit. From conception (Luke 1:35) through growth (Luke 2:40, 52), public anointing (Matthew 3:16–17), wilderness testing (Luke 4:1), Galilean ministry (Luke 4:14, 18–19), exorcism (Matthew 12:28), and the cross (Hebrews 9:14), every aspect of Christ's human existence is marked by Spirit-dependence and Spirit-empowerment. This pattern is the normative model for the Christian life: as Christ was led by the Spirit to faithful obedience, so the believer is called and empowered by the same Spirit to walk in the same pattern of dependent, responsive, obedient Spirit-empowered existence.
Episkiazō	Greek: to overshadow. The verb used in Luke 1:35 to describe the Spirit's action in the virginal conception ("the power of the Most High will overshadow you") and in the Transfiguration narrative (Luke 9:34, where the divine cloud overshadows the disciples). The word evokes the shekinah glory that overshadowed the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35) and suggests that the incarnation is the supreme divine tabernacling: God's presence, which once dwelt in the tent of meeting, now takes up His dwelling in a womb of human flesh through the Spirit's creative action.
Second Adam	The Pauline designation for Christ as the one who reverses Adam's failure and accomplishes what the first Adam should have accomplished (Romans 5:12–19; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49). In the wilderness temptation narrative, Jesus' Spirit-empowered faithfulness under the most extreme conditions contrasts directly with Adam's failure under far more favorable ones. The Second Adam's victory is achieved not by bypassing the conditions of human temptability but by relying on the Spirit's strength and the Word of God in a way that the first Adam refused to do. As the Second Adam, Jesus inaugurates the new humanity, a humanity defined by Spirit-empowered, Word-sustained obedience to the Father.
Diā Pneumatos Aiōniou	Greek: "through the eternal Spirit." The phrase in Hebrews 9:14 describing the mechanism of Christ's self-offering on the cross: He offered Himself "without blemish to God" through the eternal Spirit. The preposition diā indicates instrumentality or mediation: the Spirit is the divine Agent through whom Christ's priestly self-offering is presented to the Father. The adjective aiōnios (eternal) connects the Spirit here with the Spirit's eternal divine being, emphasizing that the same co-equal, co-eternal Third Person of the Holy Trinity who was present at creation is present at the cross, mediating the supreme act of Christ's obedient love.
Kingdom of God	The dynamic reign of God through His Messiah, inaugurated in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and to be consummated at His return. In Matthew 12:28, Jesus equates the presence of the Spirit's power in His exorcistic ministry with the arrival of the kingdom: "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The Spirit is therefore not merely the empowering resource for kingdom work; He is the

Term	Definition
	constitutive presence of the kingdom itself. Where the Spirit operates in His full New Covenant power, the kingdom is present. The already/not-yet character of the kingdom corresponds to the already/not-yet character of the Spirit's New Covenant fullness: present in firstfruits now, fully consummated at the new creation.
Without Measure	The pneumatological superlative applied to Jesus' reception of the Spirit in John 3:34: "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure." In the Old Covenant, the Spirit was distributed selectively and in measured portions, specific empowerments for specific tasks. In the New Covenant, the Spirit is given more broadly, but still to creatures with creaturely limitations. In Jesus' case alone, the Spirit is given "without measure", without limit, without restriction, in the fullness of His divine Person dwelling upon the sinless human nature of the eternal Son. This unlimited Spirit-reception is the pneumatological ground of Jesus' unique authority to teach, to forgive, to heal, and to pour out the Spirit upon all who believe.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: *What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that Jesus' human life, from conception through death, was genuinely, fully, and permanently Spirit-empowered; and that this Spirit-empowerment was not a divine shortcut that bypassed the real conditions of human existence but the Spirit's presence with and within an authentically human person in His genuinely human mode of existence. This conviction has two crucial implications. First, it means that Jesus' life is genuinely exemplary for us: He shows us what Spirit-dependent human obedience looks like, in real conditions of temptation, weakness, and suffering, and not merely in the comfortable and unchallenging circumstances of an uncontested existence. Second, it means that His atonement is genuinely sufficient: because He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit as a human being in authentic human obedience, not as a divine being that was immune to the cost of obedience, His offering covers the full range of human failure. The Spirit-empowered obedience of the incarnate Son is the ground of the believer's justification.

We must also believe that the Christological pattern, Spirit-conceived, Spirit-grown, Spirit-anointed, Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-offered, is the normative pattern for the Christian life. This does not mean that the believer can replicate Christ's perfect sinlessness. It means that the same Spirit who empowered Christ for His mission has been given to the believer for the same fundamental mode of dependent, responsive, Word-sustained obedience. The call to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16) is not an invitation to extraordinary religious experience; it is an invitation to live in the same pattern of Spirit-dependence that characterized the entire earthly life of Jesus Christ.

B. For the Heart: *What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the portrait of the Spirit-anointed Christ produced by this lesson create in you a specific and grounded devotional response to the Spirit's present ministry in your life. When the Spirit convicts you of sin, He is doing to you what the Spirit did for Christ in Gethsemane: sustaining your obedience under pressure, calling you back from the path of self-will toward the path of the cross. When the Spirit illumines the Word of God in your reading, He is doing what He did for Jesus in the wilderness: providing the sword of the Spirit that defeats the adversary's accusations and the mind's temptations toward unbelief. When the Spirit empowers your witness and your service, He is doing what He did through Jesus' ministry: making the kingdom of God present through the Spirit-filled instrumentality of an obedient human life.

Desire, above all, to be the kind of Spirit-dependent person that Jesus was. Not the kind of person who merely prays for the Spirit's help in the crises of life while functionally operating in the Spirit's absence in the ordinary moments, but the kind of person whose entire existence, from its beginning (like the Spirit-conceived Christ) to its end (like the Spirit-offered Christ), is constituted and sustained by moment-by-moment dependence on the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. The goal is not dramatic spiritual experience; it is the quiet, sustained, Word-rooted,

Spirit-empowered obedience that marked the entirety of Jesus' life and that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is now working to produce in those who are united to Christ by faith.

C. For the Hands: *What Must We Do?*

- Read the Gospel of Luke from beginning to the end of chapter 4 with a pneumatological lens, tracking every mention of the Spirit's presence or activity in relation to Jesus: 1:35 (conception), 2:40 (growth), 3:22 (baptism), 4:1 (led into wilderness), 4:14 (returned in power), 4:18–19 (anointed for mission). As you read, note the different verbs used for the Spirit's relationship to Jesus at each point: came upon, upon Him, descending, full of, led, in the power of, upon Me. What does the variety of descriptions suggest about the multidimensional character of the Spirit's presence with Christ?
- Read Jesus' wilderness temptation narrative (Matthew 4:1–11 or Luke 4:1–13) as a model of Spirit-empowered resistance to temptation. Identify the specific form of each temptation (bread, miraculous protection, worldly authority). Note Jesus' response to each: "It is written." What does the pattern of Word-response to Satanic pressure suggest about the relationship between the Spirit's empowerment and the use of Scripture? How does the Spirit who empowered Jesus' use of the Word empower the believer's use of the same Word in the face of temptation (Ephesians 6:17)?
- Read Hebrews 9:11–14 as a pneumatological commentary on the atonement. Trace the specific argument: old covenant sacrifices vs. Christ's sacrifice; animal blood vs. the blood of Christ; external purification vs. conscience cleansing; the Spirit's role as the Agent "through" whom the offering is presented. How does understanding the atonement as a Trinitarian act, Father accepting, Son offering, Spirit mediating, deepen your understanding of both the sufficiency and the character of Christ's priestly work?
- Meditate on John 3:34: "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure." The one who gives the Spirit without measure is the One who received the Spirit without measure. What does it mean for the believer's confidence in the Spirit's present ministry that the Spirit given to us was poured out by the One who possessed Him without limit? How does this connect to the Christological ground of Pentecost: the enthroned Christ pouring out the Spirit (Acts 2:33)?
- Read Luke 4:18–19 (the Nazareth manifesto) alongside Acts 1:8 (the church's commissioning). In Luke 4, Jesus is anointed by the Spirit to preach, release, heal, and proclaim the year of favor. In Acts 1:8, the disciples will receive power when the Spirit comes, and will be witnesses to the ends of the earth. What is the structural correspondence between these two anointing statements? How does the church's Spirit-empowered mission reflect and participate in the Christ's Spirit-empowered mission that Luke 4 inaugurates?

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, had you thought of Jesus' earthly life as being characterized by Spirit-dependence in the same way that the believer's Christian life is meant to be? Or did you tend to think of Jesus' ministry as operating primarily on the basis of His divine nature rather than through the Spirit's empowerment of His human nature? What theological difference does it make which of these frameworks you operate with?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Luke 1:26–38 carefully. Gabriel's announcement in verse 35 uses two parallel constructions: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" and "the power of the Most High will overshadow you." What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High in this verse, are they the same or different? What does the word "overshadow" (*episkiazō*) evoke in the Old Testament context (cf. Exodus 40:34–35; Numbers 9:15–16)? What theological claim is being made about the incarnation by the use of this verb?
3. Read Matthew 3:13–17. The Spirit descends and "remains" upon Jesus (cf. John 1:32–33). The Father speaks: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." At this point in Jesus' life, He has done nothing publicly visible, no miracles, no teaching, no public ministry. Why is the Father "well-pleased" before the public ministry begins? What does this tell us about the basis of the Father's pleasure, is it performance-based, or rooted in something more fundamental about Jesus' identity and the relationship between the Father and the Son?
4. Read Luke 4:1–14. Note the pneumatological bookends: "full of the Holy Spirit" at the beginning (v. 1) and "in the power of the Spirit" at the end (v. 14). How do the descriptions change? What has the wilderness experience accomplished in relation to the Spirit's empowerment of Jesus' mission? What does the Spirit do during the forty days of temptation, is His role passive (simply being present) or active (enabling the resistance to temptation)?
5. Read Matthew 12:22–28. The Pharisees attribute Jesus' exorcistic power to Beelzebul. Jesus refutes this with an argument from kingdom coherence and then makes the positive counter-claim in verse 28: "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." What is the logical structure of Jesus' argument? What is the relationship between the Spirit's presence and the kingdom's arrival implied by this statement? What are the implications of this for understanding the nature of the kingdom of God?

6. Read Hebrews 9:11–14 and identify every contrast the author draws between the Old Covenant sacrifices and Christ’s offering. What is the specific function of the phrase “through the eternal Spirit” (v. 14) in the argument? Why is the Spirit’s role important for the argument about the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice? What does the adjective “eternal” applied to the Spirit contribute to the author’s pneumatological claim?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson identifies two heresies that must not be read into the Spirit’s descent at Jesus’ baptism: adoptionism (Jesus becomes the Son of God at baptism) and kenoticism (the Spirit makes up for divine attributes that the Son surrendered at the incarnation). What specific textual or theological arguments refute each of these misreadings? How does the correct reading of the baptism narrative, as the public messianic inauguration rather than an ontological change, preserve both the full deity of the Son and the genuine significance of the Spirit’s anointing?
8. The lesson argues that Jesus’ growth in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52) is the growth of His human mind in its authentic human mode of development, not a growth in the divine nature. What is the Christological framework (particularly the distinction between the two natures) that makes this claim intelligible? How does the Spirit’s role in Jesus’ human development relate to the Spirit’s role in any human being’s intellectual and moral formation? What makes Jesus’ Spirit-mediated development unique?
9. The lesson presents Jesus as “the model of Spirit-empowered obedience” and draws a correspondence between the Spirit’s work in Christ and the Spirit’s work in believers (Spirit-conceived/Spirit-regenerated; Spirit-anointed for mission/Spirit-anointed for witness; Spirit-led through testing/Spirit-led through the Christian life). How exact is this correspondence? What are the crucial asymmetries, the ways in which Christ’s Spirit-empowered existence is qualitatively different from the believer’s? What is at stake theologically if the asymmetries are underplayed?
10. Matthew 12:28 connects the Spirit’s presence with the kingdom’s arrival. The lesson argues that “the Spirit is not merely the empowering resource for kingdom work; He is the constitutive presence of the kingdom itself.” Evaluate this claim. What does it mean for the Spirit to be the constitutive presence of the kingdom rather than merely its instrument? How does this relate to the eschatological dimension of the Spirit’s ministry, the fact that the Spirit is the firstfruits of the new creation (Romans 8:23) and the down payment of the final inheritance (Ephesians 1:14)?
11. Hebrews 9:14 says Christ offered Himself “without blemish” through the eternal Spirit. What is the relationship between the Spirit’s enabling of Christ’s obedience and Christ’s human free will in the act of offering? Is the Spirit’s enabling of the offering coercive, or does it work through and with Christ’s genuinely human will? How does this question connect to the broader Reformed understanding of the Spirit’s work in the believer’s sanctification, does He work through the believer’s will or bypass it?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson proposes that the wilderness temptation narrative is a model of Spirit-empowered resistance to temptation: the Spirit fills Christ, and Christ responds to every temptation with “It is written.” Apply this pattern to a specific, currently active temptation in your own life. What is the Satanic logic of the temptation? What is the corresponding word of Scripture that addresses it? What would it look like to respond to this temptation with the same Spirit-empowered, Word-anchored resistance that Jesus employed in the wilderness?
13. The lesson argues that Hebrews 9:14 reveals the atonement as a Trinitarian act: Father accepting, Son offering, Spirit mediating. How does understanding the cross as a Trinitarian event rather than merely a transaction between the Son and the Father change the way you receive the atonement devotionally? What role does your awareness of the Spirit’s mediation of Christ’s offering play in your experience of assurance, gratitude, and worship at the Lord’s Table?
14. The lesson closes with the observation that there is a crucial asymmetry in the Christological pattern: Christ’s Spirit-empowered life produced perfect obedience; the believer’s produces real but imperfect obedience. How does maintaining this asymmetry protect the gospel? And how does maintaining the genuine correspondence, the same Spirit empowering the same pattern of dependent obedience, protect against a passive fatalism that treats sanctification as unnecessary because justification is complete?
15. The lesson proposes reading Acts 1:8 alongside Luke 4:18–19 as corresponding anointing statements: Christ anointed for messianic mission, the church anointed for witness mission. If Christ’s Spirit-anointing for mission is the template for the church’s Spirit-anointing for witness, what does this imply about the character, scope, and cost of the church’s mission? Luke 4’s mission is to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. Who, in your specific ministry context, are the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed to whom the Spirit-anointed witness is sent?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson with a meditative reading of Luke 4:1–21, the double movement of the Spirit-filled Christ: first led into the wilderness for forty days of testing and then returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit to inaugurate His public mission. Read slowly, attending to the pneumatological precision of each verse: “Full of the Holy Spirit” (v. 1), not partially filled, not occasionally empowered, but full; “was led around by the Spirit” (v. 1), the Spirit as the active agent of Jesus’ direction; “in the power of the Spirit” (v. 14), the fullness that entered the wilderness is the power that comes out of it; “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me” (v. 18), the anointing that grounds every subsequent act of messianic ministry. After the reading, pause and let the portrait of the Spirit-filled Christ speak before any analysis or instruction begins.

Begin the prayer time by adoring the Spirit for His role in the entirety of Christ’s incarnate life. Thank Him specifically for each pneumatological moment covered in this lesson: for the extraordinary condescension of the Spirit’s creative work in the womb of the Virgin Mary, making possible the incarnation of the eternal Son; for His sustaining, illuminating presence during the hidden years of Jesus’ growth in wisdom and in stature; for the public, Trinitarian inauguration of the messianic mission at the Jordan River; for the Spirit’s leading of the Son through the wilderness testing to faithful victory; for the Spirit-empowered teaching, healing, and exorcism of the Galilean ministry by which the kingdom of God was made present; and for the eternal Spirit’s mediation of the priestly self-offering at Calvary, through which the debt of sin was paid and the new covenant was sealed in blood.

Move then to personal application prayer. Pray through the three corresponding pairs of the Christological pattern and its ecclesial realization: (1) Spirit-conception and Spirit-regeneration, thank God for the same Spirit who conceived the Son in Mary’s womb who regenerated you from spiritual death to spiritual life; pray for those you know who have not yet been regenerated, asking the Spirit to do in them what He did in you, the sovereign creative work of new birth. (2) Messianic anointing and ecclesial empowerment, ask the Spirit for the same anointing for your specific missional calling that He gave to Jesus for the messianic mission; pray for clarity about the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed to whom you are specifically sent. (3) Spirit-led through temptation and Spirit-led through the Christian life, bring your current temptations before God in explicitly pneumatological terms, asking the Spirit who led Jesus through forty days of wilderness testing to lead you through the specific forms of temptation you face now.

Close with the Trinitarian confession that the Spirit’s role in Christ’s life demands: the Father who sent the Son, the Son who obeyed in the power of the Spirit, and the Spirit who enabled the obedience that accomplished redemption. Express the gratitude that Hebrews 9:14 warrants: that the offering through which you are cleansed, from dead works to serve the living God, was presented to the Father not reluctantly or merely legally but through the eternal Spirit, in a love and a willing obedience that the Spirit enabled and sustained from Gethsemane

to the cry of consummation. The same Spirit who was present at the cross is present in this room. He is the Spirit of the One who offered Himself for you. Receive Him accordingly.

*“how much more will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without
blemish to God,
cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the
living God?”*

Hebrews 9:14, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Luke 1:35; Luke 2:40, 52; Matthew 3:16–17; John 1:32–33; Luke 4:1–2, 14, 18–19; Matthew 4:1–11; Matthew 12:22–28; Luke 11:20; John 3:34; Hebrews 9:11–14; Acts 1:8; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 61:1–2

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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