

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

Who is the Holy Spirit?

According to one Newsweek article, 47% of Americans claim to have experienced the Holy Spirit in their lives. Of course, that statistic depends upon how one defines the Holy Spirit. And let me tell you, there are a lot of nebulous ideas out there about who the Holy Spirit really is.

Several years ago, Gwen Shamblin founder of the *Weigh Down Diet* (and one who at that time claimed to be an evangelical believer) created quite a stir by outright denying the personality of the Holy Spirit. She claims the Spirit of God is simply the “will” of God and refers to the Holy Spirit as an “it” as if he were a type of laser beam.ⁱ

Or when was the last time you spoke to a Jehovah’s Witness about the Holy Spirit? They not only deny the deity of Jesus Christ but view the Holy Spirit as a mere “influence” from God on our behalf.

Contemporary Unitarianism teaches that there is only one person who is God, the Father. Jesus was merely a man with a strong God consciousness and the Holy Spirit is simply God’s activity in the world.ⁱⁱ

Amazingly, such an understanding of the Holy Spirit is very popular in our post-modern world. Movies ranging from Star Wars in which Luke Skywalker “feels the force” to the Matrix all subtly promote a nebulous, pantheistic take on God. And I fear that far too frequently such vague, mystical ideas influence the way many in our churches think about the Holy Spirit. A. W. Tozer once wrote that when the average Christian thinks about the Holy Spirit “he is likely to imagine a nebulous substance like a wisp of invisible smoke.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What comes to your mind when you think of the Holy Spirit? We can relate to God the Father and God the Son. After all, we think in “father and son” terms all the time. But God the Holy Spirit?

Is the Holy Spirit simply a “wisp of invisible smoke” or a “personification of holy power,” or the “exerted energy” of God? It could be that, after last week’s message in which we looked at various images used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit (wind, dove, deposit, oil, fire, or water), you came away with the idea that the Holy Spirit is some kind of ill-defined “it.” And yet nothing could be further from the truth.

So this morning we’re asking the question: Who is the Holy Spirit? But in asking that question, I’m not introducing 30 minutes of theologizing. The answer to that question has weighty implications for whatever you’re facing in life right now. So what are the implications of the Holy Spirit’s *true* identity for your life and mine?

I. The Spirit of God is a Person.

A. What the Holy Spirit is *not*.

In answering the question, Who is the Holy Spirit? ...it would be good to first clarify *what the Holy Spirit is not*. First (...and this is so obvious that you may wonder why it is worth mentioning), the Holy Spirit is not a *visible, physical* being (John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17). This, of course, is seen in the name, “Holy *Spirit*.” The Old Testament word, *ruwach*, as well as the New Testament word, *pneuma*, mean literally “breath, air, wind, or spirit.”

A teacher was trying to explain the Holy Spirit to a group of children. She took a piece of paper, blew on it, letting it “fly” away. “The Spirit is like that,” she explains to the children. “The Spirit is like the wind – invisible, but producing effects that we can see.” At which point, a six year-old boy said, “But I want the wind to be un-visible!”

What a teachable moment! And I have a hunch that it’s not only the six-year-olds that want the Spirit to be *un-visible* in their life experience. And He can be! While the Spirit of God is not a physical being, He can be very *un-visible* in our daily life.

But there’s something else the Holy Spirit is *not*. The Holy Spirit is not a *thing* or an *it*...such as a substance, energy, idea, or personification; or even for that matter a dusty creed. There are some cultists that will knock on your door and make reference to a verse in the Bible like Romans 8:16. Here’s how that verse reads in the King James Version:

The Spirit *itself* beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:
Romans 8:16 KJV

“Ah-ah,” they will be quick to point out, “this verse speaks of the Spirit as an *it*... ‘the Spirit itself.’” And if they are really proficient in their argumentation, they might even add, “The word ‘spirit’ in Greek is neuter. So you see...the Spirit is an *it*.”

So how do you respond? You feel intuitively that the verse should read “himself” rather than “itself” (After all, I wouldn’t say, “My wife is here with me this morning. *It* will prepare a fine lunch this afternoon!). You’re just not quite sure how to explain this enigma.

It will help to understand that in the Greek language (which Paul wrote in) there are three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. But unlike the English language, *these genders have nothing to do with personality or sexuality*. They are purely grammatical in nature. In Greek, to say I have a friend in the feminine gender is like saying I have a friend in the accusative case! Gender in Greek (as in other languages like French) is rather arbitrary.

So when Paul uses a neuter pronoun (Greek: *auto*; English: *itself*) to refer to the Spirit (neuter in Greek), he is saying absolutely nothing about the Spirit being an “it” rather than a “he.” He is simply making the pronoun “it” agree in gender with the noun, “Spirit,” which is also neuter in gender. In fact, nearly all other translations since the King James Bible in 1611 have more correctly translated this verse as “The Spirit *himself* bears witness...” And these translators had good reason to make this change, because even the biblical writers do. Let me give you an example found in John 16.

“But when *he* (Greek masculine: *ekeínos*), the Spirit (Greek neuter: *tó pneuma*) of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” John 16:13^{iv}

So the Spirit of God is *not* an indefinite “it.” The Spirit is a person. Say that with me: THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON. He is not energy. He is not enthusiasm. He is not a simple personification, like Santa Claus is the personification of Christmas or Jack Frost is the personification of cold weather. Nor is the Holy Spirit to be relegated to the rank of a dusty creed or confession that has little relevance to our everyday life. We are not to fear the Holy Spirit, like we would fear an asphyxiating gas that could overcome us. No, the Holy Spirit is a person and relates to you and me in personal terms.

B. Has the qualities of a person.

How do we know that? Apart from these details of grammar we’ve just looked at, *the Holy Spirit has the qualities of a person*. The Holy Spirit has mind, will and emotion. Paul says, “No one *knows* the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11; cf. Romans 8:27; Isaiah 11:2). The Spirit of God has a *mind*, i.e. reasoning capabilities.

The Spirit of God has *emotion*. Paul writes to the Ephesians saying, “Do not *grieve* the Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30).

That same word “grieve” is used of the disciples’ sorrow over the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Matthew 17:23) and of Jesus’ intense sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). It is also used of the sorrow of believers over the death of a loved one (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It is this same intense emotion of sorrow that the Holy Spirit feels when you and I use our body, His temple, for sinful purposes. Why is the Holy Spirit grieved? Because He is a person.

The Spirit of God is described as having a *will* (Acts 13:2; 16:6-7). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are described as being the “work of one and the same Spirit, and he [the Spirit] gives them to each one, *just as he determines* [or wills]” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

C. Acts like a person.

But not only does the Spirit of God have the qualities of a person. He also *acts* like a person. He guides (John 16:13), convicts (John 16:8), prays (Romans 8:26-27), searches (1 Corinthians 2:10), prohibits (Acts 16:6-7), speaks (Hebrews 1:1-2), loves (Romans 16:13) and reveals (1 Corinthians 2:10; Ephesians 3:5).

D. Can be mistreated as a person.

And what is particularly important for you and me is that, because the Holy Spirit *is* a person (having the qualities of a person and acting like a person), *the Holy Spirit can be mistreated as a person*. We can blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31), we can lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-3), we can resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10; 7:51; cf. Genesis 6:3), we can insult the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29) and we can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). But here’s the bottom line. When you and I as believers do this, we are not blaspheming, resisting, grieving, insulting a substance, an idea, an energy, a personification, a nebulous force, or even a creed or doctrine...*but a very real person*.

II. The Holy Spirit is a divine person.

The Holy Spirit, however, is more than a person. The Holy Spirit is a *divine person*. What makes our sin against the Spirit particularly serious is that our sin against the Spirit is sin against God.

How do we know the Holy Spirit is a divine person? The *attributes of the Spirit* mentioned in the Bible show that he is God. For example:

- ◆ He knows all things (Isaiah 40:12-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- ◆ He is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- ◆ He is all-powerful (Job 33:4; Romans 15:19)
- ◆ He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14)

The psalmist David says, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7) And the answer is an implied “nowhere!” If I knew all things, was present everywhere, all-powerful, and eternal...then I would be God. But I’m not! And yet the Spirit is.

Beyond this, the *works of the Spirit* demonstrate that he is God. As a finite being, I wasn’t active in the creation of the world. And neither were you. But the Spirit of God was (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13).^v As a finite being, I had nothing to do with the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary his mother. But the Holy Spirit did (Matthew 1:18-20). As a finite human being, I cannot bring about my own eternal salvation. But the Spirit of God can (1 Corinthians 6:11).

And finally, the *names* of the Spirit show that he is God. In the biblical world, a name says everything. For you children, maybe your parents have read you the old story of the seven dwarfs: Doc, Sleepy, Dopey, Grumpy, Sneezy, Happy and Bashful.^{vi} Their names say something about their character, don’t they? So it is with the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ He is the *Holy Spirit* (Romans 1:4; 1 John 2:20)^{vii}
- ◆ He is the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)
- ◆ He is the Spirit of glory (1 Peter 4:14)
- ◆ He is the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2)
- ◆ He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 16:13; 17:17)
- ◆ He is the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29)
- ◆ He is the Spirit of wisdom (Ephesians 1:17; Isaiah 11:2)
- ◆ He is God (Acts 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Do you realize just what that means for you and me? If the Spirit of God is all of these things (truth, life, wisdom, grace, holiness...), and the Spirit of God lives in me, what does that mean for *my* life?

One story in the Bible that pulls together a lot of what we have said is found in Acts 5. It’s the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Do you remember what happens? Ananias and his wife Sapphira

sell some personal property. It was probably a seller's market and they were downright stoked with the price they got for it. In fact, so much so that they began to devise a rather crafty scheme. They decided that they would act as if they were giving *all* the money to God, but in reality keep back some of the money for themselves. That way, they not only make a great profit from the sale, but they make a good impression on others at the same time!

But they forgot one factor, an important one at that. The Spirit of God, being God, sees all. He knows our hearts. He knew their hearts. He knew their deception. You can't lie to the Holy Spirit and get away with it.

So Peter, the Apostle, looks Ananias in the eye and asks: "How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have *lied to the Holy Spirit* and have kept for yourself some of the money you received from the land?" But then Peter adds, "*You have not lied to men, but to God.*" In lying to the Holy Spirit, they lied to God. And the only way that could be is if the Holy Spirit is God.

Believer, the Spirit of God is a person. And more than that, the Spirit of God is a divine person. He knows your heart and your hidden motives, because He is God. He sees all things and he knows all things. Nothing is hidden from his sight. When you sin, you sin against the Holy Spirit. Paul writes this to the believers in the church at Thessalonica:

For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8).

And when you sin against the Holy Spirit, you sin against God. Do you recognize just how serious this is? Apparently, Ananias and Sapphira didn't and it cost them their life.

III. The Holy Spirit is one with yet distinct from God the Father and God the Son.

Not only is the Holy Spirit a person. And not only is the Holy Spirit a divine person, sharing deity with God the Father. *The Holy Spirit is one with and yet distinct from God the Father and God the Son.* This is what we traditionally call the doctrine of the trinity.

Actually, that word is not the best word for describing God. The word "trinity" literally means "three-ness"^{viii} and has led many to believe that Christians worship three gods. Nothing could be further from the truth. A better term may be the word "tri-unity." This word better speaks of the fact that God is one, and yet exists in three persons. In other words, He is *three* in one sense and *one* in another.

I'm not going to spend much time here this morning, because in a few weeks Pastor Reilly will take up this subject and give some new insight into how the teaching on the tri-unity of God applies practically to the Christian life. This morning, I want to simply show you that the Old Testament already hints at this tri-unity of God. So the next time you're speaking to a Jew (or for that matter, even a Muslim who respects the OT Scriptures), take them to this passage.

It is called the *Shema*, meaning “hear,” and it is found in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is *one*.

What I want you to notice is that last word “one.” It could be argued (as many have) that such a verse excludes the idea of the “tri-unity” of God. But in this verse, that word “one” (*echad* in Hebrew) means not *one in isolation* but *one in unity*. There are many examples of this in the Old Testament,^{ix} but probably one of the best is found in Genesis 2:24. God brings to Adam his wife, Eve, saying, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, *and the two shall be one [echad] flesh.*” In a similar but not completely identical way, God exists in three persons and yet He is one.^x

I don’t claim that this is a simple truth. Nothing of any real significance is simple. Life isn’t simple. Family relationships aren’t simple. My wife’s relationship with me isn’t simple! (She’s nodding “Amen!”) Even the cheap watch on my arm isn’t simple. I’ve had it for a year, and I still can’t figure out the stop watch function. But do I really want a God who is less mysterious than my watch?

IV. The Holy Spirit is God among us and in us.

If the Holy Spirit is a person, a divine person, one with and yet distinct from God the Father and God the Son, then the Holy Spirit is *God among us and in us*. If you don’t go away with anything else this morning, I want you to go away with this: The Holy Spirit is God among us and in us.

Do you catch the significance of that? If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is *God in you*. And this is true not only individually, but corporately. When we come together as the church gathered, the Holy Spirit in each of us is among us.

In the Old Testament, Israel was known as the “people of the Presence.” God promises through his prophets: “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.”^{xi}

Moses, said to be the most humble man on the face of the earth, intensely recognized his need for God’s presence. After the Israelites sinned, Moses cried out to God: “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here” And what does God say to Moses? He says, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14-16).

Maybe you feel like Moses: “Lord, if you aren’t with me and in me, then I can’t make it!” And God’s reply is: “I *am* in you. I live in you by my Holy Spirit.” *The Holy Spirit is God’s presence in you.*

But you know what? God doesn’t fill with His Holy Spirit those who are full of themselves. It’s not without significance that Moses is said to be the most humble man on the face of the earth. And that brokenness of self led to the fullness of God’s Spirit.

Last week Melissa sang these words over us: “O Wind of God, come bend us, break us, Till humbly we confess our need; Then in thy tenderness, remake us, revive, restore, for this we plead.”

Is that your desire?

ⁱ See <http://www.wdworkshop.com/church.asp>

ⁱⁱ Of course, none of this is anything new. Arius, an Alexandrian bishop in the Fourth Century denied the Holy Spirit’s personality, considering him to be the “exerted energy” of God.

ⁱⁱⁱ *A Treasury* p. 41

^{iv} See also John 14:16; 26-27; 15:26.

^v All three persons are involved in the work of creation. The Father is seen as the designer, the Son as the executer, and the Holy Spirit as the One who finishes the work (adorns). In salvation it is the same. The Father wills it, the Son makes it possible, and the Spirit applies it.

^{vi} <http://disney.go.com/vault/archives/characters/sevendwarfs/sevendwarfs.html>

^{vii} This complete designation “Holy Spirit” occurs only twice in the Old Testament: Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10).

^{viii} From the Latin *trinitas*.

^{ix} There are many examples of this: Genesis 1:5; 2:24; Numbers 13:23; Ezra 2:64; Jeremiah 32:38, 39. Another Hebrew term, *yachid*, emphasizes the idea of “one in isolation.” See Genesis 22:2; Proverbs 4:3; Psalm 22:20; Judges 11:34.

^x Little wonder then that the text of Genesis 1 reads, “Let us make man in *our* image...so God created man in *his* own image.”

^{xi} Ezekiel 37:26-27