

Person Of The Holy Spirit

Rightly Dividing The Word: Shelf 5 — Volume 44

In any study of the Holy Spirit, it is first necessary to define some basic concepts and words by which we communicate with one another on this subject. Understanding the definition behind key words will greatly aid our interpretation of those concepts the Holy Spirit reveals in the Bible in order to communicate to us His being, work and influence on our lives. A common understanding of definitions will also guard against confusion that often arises in any discussions that are beyond our earthly environment.

Much of the misunderstanding in studies concerning the Holy Spirit actually lies in a misunderstanding of some fundamental Bible teachings concerning three other subjects: **(1)** the justice of God (Volume 46), **(2)** the free-moral freedom of humanity (Volume 47), **(3)** the occurrence of confirming miracles (Volume 58). Once we better understanding of these fundamental teachings, we can better appreciate the nature and person of the Holy Spirit.

We must always approach a study of the Scriptures with our cultural and religious backgrounds clearly in mind. We are cultural beings, and thus, when we study any material of the Bible, our culture will affect how we understand what we read. Because of this, we will often view the work of the Spirit from the standpoint of our past and present religious culture. Therefore, our religious culture will often influence us to arrive a different conclusions because we have come out of different cultural/religious backgrounds.

Regardless of our culture, or past religious background, however, we must objectively seek to allow the Bible to speak for itself. We must

subjugate our religious culture and beliefs to the authority of the word of God. We must do this, not only to understand objectively what the Bible teaches concerning the Holy Spirit, but also to maintain the fundamental teaching of the Bible that we remain united as disciples of Jesus.

No objective study of the subject of the Holy Spirit should cause disunity among those who seek to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit among Christians.

If division does occur among us in our discussions concerning the Holy Spirit, then we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is not the cause, for it is the work of the Spirit to bring believers together into one united body.

As we launch into the biblical definitions of the Spirit and His work, we must remind ourselves that we will never come to a complete understanding of the Spirit and His work. As previously stated, we would have to be God in order to fully understand God and His work. Therefore, we must not frustrate ourselves with our lack of understanding concerning those things that pertain to God.

The Holy Spirit realized that we would be somewhat frustrated in our efforts to understand that which pertains to the function of God in reference to the world. He does not, therefore, expect us to understand everything about His being and work. He wants to assure us that He will carry on with what He intends to do for us regardless of our lack of knowledge of what and how He ministers to our needs.

We must remember that the level of our understanding does not determine the function of His work in our lives. If it did, then the Spirit would certainly be hindered because of our failure to understand fully how He works. Because of our lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the God who is past finding out by the feeble efforts of people, the Holy Spirit simply reassures us that He will do His work regardless of our understanding

of how He works. It is simply an axiomatic truth that God's work in our lives is not controlled by our lack of knowledge of His work.

If anyone would relegate the limits of the work of the Holy Spirit to the extent of human understanding, then he or she has created an idolatrous spirit that can work no greater than human understanding.

A. The "Person" Of The Holy Spirit

Any attempt to comprehend God by use of our human dictionary will surely end in frustration. There is too much earthly baggage hanging on our words. Struggling to use earthly defined words to define that which is beyond this world is certainly a challenge that is faced by every Bible interpreter. Therefore, when reading words that the Spirit used to define His being and work, we must keep in mind that we are using words of this world that often carry with them the earthly baggage of how we use the words in our own lives. We thus caution ourselves in making any definition of God the Holy Spirit with the use of the words of our dictionary.

In any study of the Holy Spirit, we must seek to understand what the Bible teaches concerning the "person" of the Spirit. With the use of the word "person," we have already limited our understanding of the Spirit. Nevertheless, by using the word "person" we are referring to the individual identity or nature of the Spirit Himself. **But keep in mind that our use of the word "person" carries with it our earthly baggage of how we identify ourselves as individuals.**

The Holy Spirit is a person of the eternal *Elohim*. This Hebrew word for God is plural in its use in Genesis 1:1. This "plural" God created the heavens and earth. When God (plural) said, "**Let Us make man**" (Gn 1:26), the Holy Spirit was a part of the eternal **Us** that formed man from the dust of the earth. Though the Son of God as a "person" of the eternal Godhead created the world (See Cl 1:16), the Holy

Spirit could not be separated from the eternal *Elohim* who worked in partnership with the Father and Son in the creation.

The use of the word “Us” assumes that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit wanted us to understand that *Elohim* works as one, **but are three in nature and function**. What is beyond our understanding is that the one true *Elohim* both works and manifests Himself as a plurality. This does not mean that there are three Gods. It simply means that the one God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit could manifest themselves in many different ways, or ministries for us, in order to carry out their work and function in reference to creation.

The word “Godhead” is used three times in the *King James Version* to translate either the Greek phrases or words “*to theios*” or “*theiotes*,” which words are used in reference to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Acts 17:29 the word “Godhead” is used to translate *to theios* that is translated by other versions with the English words “divine nature” (NKJV), “divine being” (NIV) or “Deity” (RSV). The word “Godhead” is used to translate *theiotes* in Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9.

It is the challenge of the interpreter to be able to think beyond the words of this world in order to in some way comprehend that this is beyond this world.

The word *theiotes* refers to **the attributes, nature and properties of God as spirit** (See Jn 4:24). The nature or “property” of God is His **plurality**. This has confused many Bible students for centuries, and thus we must not think that we can fully understand that to which the inspired writer is referring. **One would simply have to be God in order to fully understand the nature of God**. The fact that God is spirit is the length to which we can go in understanding the being of God (See Jn 4:24). But to say that God is spirit is simply to say that **His being is not of this material world**.

The Bible reveals three “personalities” or persons

of the Godhead, though the words “personality” and “person” as we use them here, should not be understood to refer to **different natures** in person or personality. The Godhead is precisely the same in character and nature. **There is no difference between the character and nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** However, the Godhead manifests Himself as three. For example, Paul stated, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”* (2 Co 13:14).

In this one statement Paul mentioned the three “personalities” of the Godhead: the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. This manifestation of three was also revealed at the baptism of Jesus (See Mt 3:13-17). Jesus, the Son, was baptized in water **on earth**. The Holy Spirit **descended on Him** in the likeness of a dove. But the Father spoke **from heaven**.

Though the Bible teaches that there is one God (See Dt 4:35; 6:4,5; Is 43:10,11; 46:8-11), the one God can be manifested to be in three different “places” at the same time in reference to this world. On earth, Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, but saw in vision the Son at the right hand of the Father (See At 7:55-59). There are numerous other statements that manifest this distinctiveness in the “persons” of the Godhead, as well as God being located in reference to our locations as individual persons (See Mt 12:28,32; Jn 11:41; 15:26; 20:17; 1 Tm 2:5). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is a distinct entity of the eternal Godhead in the sense that He has a specific work. He is not distinct in a sense of being separate. He simply has a specific work as part of the eternal *Elohim*.

Because God can be at different places at the same time in reference to our world, does not assume that the Bible teaches that there are three Gods.

It may seem that our struggle to define God, and specifically the Holy Spirit, with the words of man

is a confusing ordeal in linguistic gymnastics. This may be true. Our inability to understand how God can be three and yet one does not communicate to our human intellect. Nevertheless, this is how God has manifested Himself to us, and thus, we must be satisfied with our intellectual inadequacies to fully understand.

The Holy Spirit knew that we would be confined to the definition of the words of our dictionary. Nevertheless, He used our words in the best manner they could be used in order to explain God. At the same time, however, He realized that we could never fully understand that which is beyond the definition of our earthly words. We must caution ourselves, therefore, not to dispute with our earthly words concerning things that are beyond the definition of our dictionary. If we do, then we will be tempted to create a god after our own image, one that we can fully understand. And this would be idolatry.

B. The “Personality” Of The Holy Spirit

Personality refers to traits as emotions and feelings. We reveal our personality by the way we respond to others and situations in which we are involved. Therefore, when we seek to explain the personality of the Holy Spirit, we are often explaining who He is after the characteristics of our own personal behavior. As an eternal personality, the Holy Spirit can be **grieved** (See Ep 4:30), **vexed** (See Is 63:10), **lied to** (See At 5:3), **resisted** (See At 7:51; 1 Th 5:19), **despised** (See Hb 10:29), **blasphemed**, and **sinned against** (See Mt 12:31,32; Mk 3:28,29).

All the preceding personality functions of the Holy Spirit explain the affect of our sin on the person of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit was an impersonal entity, **then these human reactions against the Spirit would make no sense**. The fact that the Spirit is a being with emotion is revealed in the fact that we can sinfully work against Him and cause an emotional

response to our sins. The Holy Spirit, therefore, responds to our sin in a manner that is similar to someone personally sinning against us.

C. The “Gender” Of The Holy Spirit

God the Father is called the Father. God the Son was named Jesus, and thus was Jesus the Christ who fulfilled all prophecy in reference to the Messiah of Israel. However, **God the Holy Spirit has no name**. Spirit is what He is as God. The word “holy” refers to the eternal Spirit as One who is distinct from the Father and Son. But the reference “Holy Spirit” is not a name. It is a reference to who and what God the Spirit is.

Since God the Spirit is set apart from God the Father and Son for our sake, then He is “holy” (sanctified) for our benefit.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal “it.” Though Deity has no gender in the sense of male or female, the **masculine gender** was used by the Holy Spirit in the Bible to refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus said to the apostles, *“He [the Holy Spirit] will teach you all things”* (Jn 14:26). *“He will testify of Me”* (Jn 15:26). *“He will speak and He will tell you all things”* (Jn 16:13).

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome concerning the Spirit, *“He who searches the hearts ... He makes intercession”* (Rm 8:27). The Spirit said in Antioch, *“Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (At 13:2). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is not an impersonal influence.

The Holy Spirit is not a mystic force, or ghostly nudge, floating through the air. On the contrary, He is “person” or “personality” in the masculine gender as the Father and Son in order that we not identify Him as impersonal.

D. Eternal Attributes Of The Holy Spirit

In Acts 5:3 Ananias and Sapphira **lied to the Holy Spirit**. However, in verse 4 it is said that they lied to God. The Holy Spirit is God, and when one lies to the Spirit, he or she lies to God the Holy Spirit (See Gn 1:1,26).

The Spirit is of the eternal Godhead who existed before the creation of the material world (See Jb 26:13; Hb 9:14). The Spirit is not a minor God who is inferior to the Father and Son. All the nature we would attribute to the Father and Son we must also attribute to the Holy Spirit (See Mc 3:8; Rm 8:26,27; 1 Co 2:10-13).

The Holy Spirit manifests the same divine characteristics as God. The Spirit is omniscient (all-knowing) in that He *“searches all things”* (1 Co 2:10). He is omnipresent in that one cannot escape His presence (See Ps 139:7-10). When Paul spoke of the presence of God to the inhabitants of Athens, he explained that *“in Him we live and move and have our being”* (At 17:28). We live within the realm of God, which includes the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is thus mentioned to be in the presence of the eternal Father and Son (See Mt 3:13-17; 28:19,20; 2 Co 13:14). The Spirit is one with the Father and Son and shares the same eternal attributes as a part of God.

Because we cannot separate the existence and personality of the Holy Spirit from God the Father and Son, then we correctly conclude that the Holy Spirit is as God the Father and Son.

E. Relationship Of The Spirit With Saints

The early disciples walked in the *“comfort of the Holy Spirit”* (At 9:31). This presence of the Holy Spirit would reveal the nature of the Spirit, as well as what the Spirit does for the saints.

The Spirit is of a nature that is comforting to man. This closeness is defined in the New Testament as

“indwelling.” The Spirit works on behalf of Christians in prayer (See Rm 8:26,27). He was close to the apostles as a “helper” in inspiration (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). Such closeness emphasizes the individuality of the Spirit, but also His ability to influence the thinking of those who were writing inspired Scripture.

Since Christians are now living in the time of the Holy Spirit wherein it is His work to be in and with them until the end of time, Christians have a unique relationship with the Holy Spirit that was not experienced before the establishment of the church.

F. Intellectual Character Of The Spirit

When we speak of the intellect of the Spirit, we must mean that His intellect does not condescend to what we know as humans. On the contrary, the Spirit as God knows all things. The Holy Spirit **“knows the things of God”** (1 Co 2:11). He has a **mind** (See Rm 8:27). He has **freedom of choice** in that He divided the miraculous gifts among the early disciples according to **His will** (See 1 Co 12:11). He has the power of **searching** (See 1 Co 2:10), **loving** (See Rm 15:30), and **witnessing** (See Jn 15:26). All these characteristics manifest the intellectual nature of the Spirit and how He functions on behalf of the saints. Therefore, the Spirit is not a “ghost” that is whispering from one place to another.

Since the Holy Spirit used words that explain what we do as humans in our relationships with one another, then we assume correctly that He has the ability to function at least function as people in this manner.

G. The Function Of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has a specific work, or ministry in reference to our struggles to live the gospel. His specific work identifies Him as a distinct manifestation of the Godhead who works on behalf

of the Godhead.

WORKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. At the creation it was the specific work of the Spirit to **bring order to the created world** (See Gn 1:2; Jb 26:13; Ps 104:30).
2. It was the specific work of the Spirit to **inspire chosen men to speak and write Scripture** (See 1 Co 2:10-13; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21).
3. During Jesus' earthly ministry, the Spirit also **worked through Jesus** (See Mt 4:1; 12:28; Lk 4:14,18; Jn 3:34).
4. It was the specific work of the Spirit to **guide the Christ-sent apostles into all truth** (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).
5. It was the work of the Spirit to **work miraculously through the gifts that were given to the early saints for the purpose of building up the body of Christ** (See At 8:18; 1 Co 12-14; Hb 2:4).

The preceding works identify the individual ministries of the Spirit in relation to the Godhead. Since His coming after the ascension of Jesus, it has been the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus. Jesus said of Him, ***“He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”*** (Jn 16:14). It was never the purpose of the Holy Spirit to bring glory to Himself. Therefore, anyone who would glorify the Holy Spirit over Jesus does not understand the ministry of the Spirit to the saints of God.

The preceding brief points of explanation of the identity of the Holy Spirit certainly fall short of what we would like to know about the Spirit and His function in our own lives. We struggle with the definitions of our dictionary in order to understand something that is certainly beyond our earthly words. Nevertheless, the Bible reveals enough about the Spirit's identity and work to distinguish Him from the spooks and ghosts that are often conjured up in the minds of those who do not study their Bibles.

Because of their background, some people feel comfortable to say that **God is working** among us today. Others, however, feel comfortable in saying that it is the **Spirit working** among us today. Both statements are saying the same thing. Regardless

of how it is said, it is God the Spirit, and thus, the Spirit as God who is working among us. It is God the Spirit who is working all things together for the good of the Christian (See Rm 8:28). It is God the Spirit who guards us from being tempted above what we are able to endure (See 1 Co 10:13). When Jesus worked on earth, it was God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together through the manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth in order to bring the gospel into existence for the salvation of those who would believe. When Jesus ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit into this world for us. He is now working for the benefit of all believers.



ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Ci**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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