

The Person of the Holy Spirit

This morning I am beginning a series of messages on the Holy Spirit. We can hardly talk about the Christian life, experience the reality of God, or live a Christian life without the Holy Spirit. And yet He is the one Person of the Holy Trinity least understood by many Christians, and we are the poorer for it. I hope and pray that in the next several weeks you and I will come to a deeper, clearer knowledge and understanding of God the Holy Spirit, and experience His real presence in our lives.

To begin with we must be immersed in Scripture and prayer to know and understand who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in both the O.T. and N.T. Believers from N.T. times up to today have been filled with the Holy Spirit most often after much prayer. As we walk through these next several weeks I hope you will make an extra effort to read those portions of Scripture that describe the Holy Spirit and pray for understanding and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you and all of us.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a person. Jesus never referred to the H.S. as “it” but always spoke of “He” and “Him.” He is not a force or a thing but a person. The Bible ascribes to Him all the actions we would expect of a real person.¹

He speaks: Rev. 2:7; Acts 13:2.

He intercedes: Rom. 8:26 - “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

He testifies: John 15:26 - “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”

He leads: Rom. 8:14; Acts 8:29.

He commands: Acts 16:6-7.

He guides: John 16:13 - “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

He appoints: Acts 20:28.

He can be lied to: Acts 5:3-4.

He can be insulted: Heb. 10:29.

He can be blasphemed: Matt. 12:31-32 - “And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”

He can be grieved: Eph. 4:30 - “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

The Holy Spirit is a real person and also divine, just as our Creed says: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.” He is co-eternal with the Father and the Son. From the beginning, from the creation of the world to the creation of the Church, the Holy Spirit has been active as God Himself.

My car has one battery, and one only. I can use it to start the car, or turn on the radio, or blow the horn. Just so, there is one God, our Heavenly Father, who reveals Himself in three persons. Jesus makes this clear when He commands His followers to: "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Matt. 28:18-20. Baptizing them in the name of all three persons of God. One God, three persons: this is the Holy Trinity.

You could say that God the Father is preeminent in the O.T. (although the Holy Spirit is active and noted in the O.T. and signs of Christ are there also); that God the Son is preeminent in the gospels (yet God the Father is called upon and the H.S. spoken of); and that God the Holy Spirit is preeminent in the era of the Church. Yet not to the exclusion of one or the other. In the past 100 years there has arisen in Christianity a renewed emphasis on the actions of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, similar to what is recorded in the Bible. This is appropriate for the era of the Church in which God's creative and redeeming power which narrates all history is shared with peoples, and God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ to bring healing from sin is shared and received by people, and now God the Holy Spirit sanctifies believers into holiness, even as He performs "signs and wonders" to bring people to saving faith in Christ.

What Does He Do?

He guides. Suppose you travel to a foreign land and you do not know a single word of the language and the people there did not speak your language. If you wanted to get around you'd really need a guide. After His resurrection Jesus' disciples were overjoyed, but perhaps startled (if not stunned) when he told them he was going back to heaven, leaving them here on earth. He had just called them to engage in unfamiliar - maybe risky - new work (making disciples of all nations), embarking on a lifestyle new to them and maybe out of step with their culture. They had left all behind in order to follow Him and now He says He is going away. He said it was "expedient" that He go away; necessary so that He could send Someone else to take His place. He never intended to leave them alone, unguided, unguarded, and powerless. He was sending Another to be to them all that He had been.

Early 20th century Pentecostal leader Donald Gee describes His guidance this way: Jesus called Him the "Comforter." The word means "one called alongside" - Someone to help, comfort, and exhort them in their new work and lifestyle. The Comforter was and is a real Person, an actual Somebody, because Jesus spoke of Him and He. Jesus made it clear that the Comforter was the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit becomes just as much to us as if we actually possessed the personal companionship of Jesus, walking and talking with us along the way, filling our lives with His Presence.

Think of it this way: the physical presence of Jesus was limited to one place in time, while the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit is with believers everywhere. He is the personal Guide who directs our paths and gives us gifts of wisdom and power and courage to truly follow Him. He enriches all the days of our homeward journey with His rewarding presence in the work we are engaged in - that is, to witness to Jesus, the good news of God's forgiveness and healing. When necessary, He warns about unrecognized spiritual dangers and gently draws us into paths of greater safety. It is worthwhile paying attention to Him, for He knows the road well and has conducted many other Christians over it before us ... all of us heading in the direction

of our heavenly home with God. Jesus has given us this wonderful Somebody else, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the conscious presence of God, to be alongside us every day.²

The Holy Spirit walks alongside us much as Jesus walked alongside His disciples before and after His resurrection. Many Christians have this notion that the Holy Spirit is their Comforter when they are feeling low or have a disease - and there is some truth to that. But in the context of Jesus' teaching the Holy Spirit is the One who especially comforts and strengthens us when we suffer because of our faith in Christ, when we are mocked, slandered, or persecuted.

The Holy Spirit walks with us as we fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples. Jesus did not say that His death on the cross would be the end of His ministry. The night before He died He told His disciples that He must go away so that He could send the Holy Spirit to them. He had to go away, first to death on the cross to take away all sin, then to resurrection to overcome death, then to ascension into heaven to sit at God's right hand. Then the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and subsequently at other times to believers.

John the Baptist foretold this ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit: "... behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29. Then John the Baptist said of Jesus "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit," John 1:33.

Additionally, just as Jesus did, the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin: "And He, when He comes, will convict the world of sin..." John 16:8. We call this the "convicting grace of God" - unless we know our own sin we will not be healed by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit guards us against false teaching and unholy practices. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth" John 13:16. The Holy Spirit prompts us to soberly consider what we say and do in the name of Christ and leads us back to what Scripture teaches about God's character and activity. Not every "spirit" that sweeps through the church or culture or individuals is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is simply emotions, or the spirit of the times. The Holy Spirit teaches what Jesus taught: "... teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" John 14:26.

In addition the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers in order to serve the Church - we'll talk about those at a later date. Then there is the fruit of the Spirit which all Christians are expected to grow into their lives as the Holy Spirit works within them. Again, we'll consider this at a later date.

Prayer, Scripture, and a believing community together open the way for the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth.

How Does He Affect Me?

The Holy Spirit is truly God with us - continuing the ministry of Jesus in and through believers who have been redeemed from their sinful ways and brought into a new life following Jesus. The Bible speaks of being filled with the Holy Spirit and this should be the desire of all Christians. God can do marvelous works, even "signs and wonders" through us when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. Now, some Christians talk about "baptism with the Holy Spirit" and insist that this is a second action in the Christian life that happens after one is "saved" or have come to faith in Christ. They cite scriptural evidence of this. Some contend that baptism with the Spirit is necessary before a person can be fully used of God. Some even insist that baptism with the Spirit is always accompanied by some outward sign (such as speaking in tongues) and without this physical manifestation one has not been baptized with the Spirit.

Yet there is also great deal of scriptural witness that the Holy Spirit comes to believers not as a second event after conversion, but at the time of conversion or even before. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:8. We are baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit when we make that commitment to be a disciple of Jesus. We can and should be filled with the Holy Spirit, and afterward, be refilled, and even filled unto all fullness: “one baptism, but many fillings.”³

Movements and denominations have arisen due to these different understandings of the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Though a particular church or Christian denomination might not be called “Pentecostal” that does not mean the Holy Spirit is absent from those individuals or congregations. The church in all times and places, needs the Holy Spirit to fulfill her mission to bring people to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and then lead them into a life of holiness preparing them for our eternal home with God. These different understandings of “filling with the Holy Spirit” or “baptism of the Holy Spirit” need not separate us as Christians, whether in this congregation or among our Christian brothers and sisters in other churches. Let us all pray, pray, pray to be filled, filled to overflowing, with the Holy Spirit so that we may declare the glorious riches we have in God through faith in Jesus Christ. We can talk all we want about the Spirit, but what is necessary is to talk to Him ... invite Him into our lives and living. Let us receive the Holy Spirit so that the gifts He gives to the church will be manifest in our congregation. Let us be filled so that the power and encouragement to live a holy life will arise in each of us. Let us walk in the Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit may grow within us and be evident in our relationships with one another.

Now let us pray ...

Holy Spirit Prayer (John 7:38)

Heavenly Father in the world there are distractions and resistance to the Gospel message. We need the advantage you promised us with the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit and fill our inner most being. Out of our inner most being Holy Spirit flow forth like a river. Wash away anything that would prevent Your complete takeover of our lives and Your church. Amen.

¹ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit, Activating God's Power in Your Life*, (1988, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN), 2-4. The list which follows is from Billy Graham.

² Donald Gee, *Pentecostal Experience, The Writings of Donald Gee*; David A. Womack, Ed. (1993, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO) 34-36.

³ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, 66.