

The Holy Spirit

In the fourth century there was a group known as the *Pneumatomachians*, literally, 'fighters against the Spirit'. Their attack was against the deity of the Holy Spirit. Some today continue this fight and even take it further and deny His personality too. They will claim that He is not at work in this age and the gifts of the Holy Spirit must be satanically inspired.

To understand what we believe and why we believe it we need to answer three questions.

1. Does the Bible show the Holy Spirit to be God?
2. Does the Bible show that the Holy Spirit has a personality?
3. What does the Bible have to say concerning the work of the Holy Spirit among Christians today?

We should use Scripture in such a way as to give the Holy Spirit Himself an opportunity to reveal the truth.

"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" - 1 Corinthians 2:14

Does the Bible show the Holy Spirit to be God?

Scripture has several references that show beyond any reasonable doubt that the Holy Spirit is God. First, what did Jesus say about the Holy Spirit?

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever" - John 14:16

W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* points out that the Greek word for 'another' in John 14:16, "*denotes another of the same kind.*" The one who was coming would be of the same kind as Jesus – not different. Just as Jesus was of the 'substance' of God, the Holy Spirit would be of the same kind.

The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son (John 14:16 and Acts 2:33), but it also gives a simple and clear declaration that the Holy Spirit is God. In Acts 5:3 we find that Ananias is said to have lied to the Holy Spirit, but in the very next verse Peter says that Ananias lied to God. To Peter and all in the early church, the Holy Spirit was God.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament is identified with Yahweh (Jehovah) of the Old Testament. See for example Hebrews 3:7-11 where the Holy Spirit tells us that He was provoked and tested. As a result He said, "*They shall not enter My rest.*" This passage in Hebrews is quoting from Psalm 95:7-11, and those verses are speaking of God. Further back still, where the incident is originally recorded in Numbers 14:23-30, we see that it is the "*Lord Jehovah*" who is speaking.

Divine works that God alone can accomplish are shown to be the work of the Holy Spirit. For instance, the work of **creation** is attributed to the Holy Spirit in Job 33:4 and Psalm 104:25-30, but Isaiah 44:24 and 45:18 show this is solely God's work. Also

regeneration (John 3:5-6 and Titus 3:5) and the very important work of **sanctification** (Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:12).

Scripture gives further evidence of the deity of the Holy Spirit by showing He has attributes only found within God. He is **eternal** (Hebrews 9:14); **omnipresent** (Psalm 139:7-10); **omnipotent** (Luke 1:35; Romans 15:13-19 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11); and **omniscient** (1 Corinthians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 40:13-14).

Note too the way that Scripture puts the name of the Holy Spirit along with the name of the Father and the name of the Son. Two examples of this are found in the apostolic commission, Matthew 28:19-20, and the benediction in 2 Corinthians. A further significant piece of evidence is that the apostles recognised the sovereignty or lordship of the Spirit. Paul writes:

“But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” - 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

Does the Bible show that the Holy Spirit has a personality?

Clearly the Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is a power (see for instance, Luke 1:35), but we believe it also gives conclusive evidence of His personality.

Jesus Christ is called the Advocate in 1 John 2:1. The same Greek word translated Comforter, is used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. An impersonal force could not fulfil the function described here. The Holy Spirit is to be the *Paraclete*, meaning someone who goes to court to speak for you – not a job for an impersonal force!

Another indication that the Scripture gives of the personality of the Holy Spirit is found in John 16:7-15. Here Jesus uses the masculine ‘He’ of the Holy Spirit twelve times although the noun translated ‘spirit’ is neuter. If these verses were to be grammatically correct they would have been written with the Holy Spirit being called ‘it’. The fact that ‘He’ is used is a deliberate indication of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Personality is not just dependent on outward form and actions but on the life within. There are three areas that need to be present for someone to be classed as a person: intellect, will, and emotion.

Intellect

John 14:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit can **teach** and this is a sign of intellect.

Romans 8:26-27 shows us that the Holy Spirit **intercedes** for us. Greek scholar W. E. Vine’s definition of ‘intercession’ shows that an impersonal force could not do it:

“Primarily to fall in with, meet with in order to converse; then to make petition, especially to make intercession, plead with a person, either for or against others.” – Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. 2, p. 267.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 also tells us that the Holy Spirit can **know** the thoughts of God; a third clear sign that the Holy Spirit has an intellect.

Will

Acts 8:29, 39 (see also Acts 10:19-20 and 16:6-7) show the Holy Spirit's work in **directing** the early church, a clear sign that the Holy Spirit has a will.

1 Corinthians 12:11 is clear that the Holy Spirit has a will of His own and can make **decisions**. He distributes the gifts just as He wills.

Emotions

The Holy Spirit can **love**, Romans 15:30 and can **comfort**, Acts 9:31, both attributes that come from the heart and show emotion. Ephesians 4:30 also shows that the Holy Spirit can be **grieved**.

According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit possesses an intellect, a will and emotions and is therefore shown to be a person.

What does the Bible have to say concerning the work of the Holy Spirit among Christians today?

Most Christians believe that the fruit of the Spirit is necessary for our lives today. Can we then divorce this work of the Holy Spirit from His gifts which He distributes as He wills? Some will say that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for today. They were only necessary to see the early church established or until that which is perfect – the Bible – came into being. This last thought comes from 1 Corinthians 13:10, which says that, when that which is perfect comes, the gifts that are partial will cease. However, what is 'that which is perfect', and has it come?

As great as the Bible is, I do not believe it is 'that which is perfect' because it looks forward to something more; God setting up His kingdom. When we see the Lord face to face we will not need the gifts, but until then they reveal God to people and we should be seeking Him to release them through us for the ministry to the world among other things.

The work of the Holy Spirit in giving gifts is vital to bring in fullness and completeness, and we do not believe we can divorce this aspect of His work from others that Scripture shows He is doing. Let us then summarise the way the Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is working in the church today.

The church came into being via the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), and He alone is the One who can bring unity (1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Ephesians 4:1-6).

He is the One who confers gifts and graces upon God's children to fulfil the work of the Lord (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Galatians 5:22-26, and Ephesians 4:8-13).

The Holy Spirit is the One who teaches Christians and the One who directs the church in its outreach to the world (John 14:26, 1 John 2:20, 27, Acts 13:1-3, 16:7 and 20:28).

All aspects of the life of the church – preaching, prayer, etc – are dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Romans 8:26-27, and Ephesians 5:18-19).

If the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, ceased His work on earth today there would be no Christian work.

In summary we discover about the Holy Spirit that:

1. He is declared to be God.
2. He has personality and is not just a force.
3. He is still at work in the Church today.

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