

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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AND WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE

The rendering of the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pnuema* into the English “Ghost” originally was not the least bit misleading. The word is derived from the Middle English “gost” or “goost,” and the Anglo-Saxon “gāst,” which meant “breath” or “spirit,”¹ which is exactly what the Biblical words meant. Words undergo change, and the word “Ghost,” which now implies a *spook* or something frightening, is no longer an appropriate translation. Sinclair Ferguson writes, “But the name *Holy Spirit*, or worse (at least at the emotional and psychological levels) *Holy Ghost*, tends to convey a cold, even remote image. After all, what is *Spirit*? Yet perhaps the older *Holy Ghost*, with its connotations of vagueness, mystery and insubstantiality, did in fact express what many Christians experience: the Holy Spirit is seen to be distant and impersonal by comparison with the Father and the Son. *We know not what spirits are, nor what our own spirit is*, wrote Abraham Kuyper. How much less capable are we of comprehending the Spirit of God? What, or who, then, is the Holy Spirit?”² The Bible described the Holy Spirit primarily in relationship with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of the Trinity is expressed over and over again in the creating work of the Father and the rescue work of the Son, and the recreating work of the Spirit, whereby people are actually made new in and through Christ. I personally doubt if there has been a more controversial subject among Christians over the last few decades than the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Beginning with the birth of Pentecostalism at the turn of the last century and with the explosion of the Charismatic movement in the 1960s and 70s (continuing on and on in what is now called “The Third Wave”),³ the subject of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit has taken center stage in the church. Charismatics point to this as evidence of God’s blessing on them and predict that the future success of the church is entirely in the hands of Charismatics.⁴ I, on the other hand, see this from a different angle. Within both the wider culture and evangelicalism, there has been, as Lane Dennis recently noted, “a broad shift away from the thinking (and reading) toward feeling and experience. The result in the Church is a superficial feeling (experienced-based theology rather than an in-depth, carefully thought-out Christian commitment.”⁵ This is especially the case when we turn our attention to the present day Charismatic movement. David F. Wells makes this telling observation: “Many charismatics have made the experience of God rather than the truth of God foundational. The self therefore becomes pivotal. This, in turn, links with the deep subterranean sense of progress that is inescapable in America, as the proponents of this movement tout it as the most recent cresting of the Spirit. Here is the cutting edge of progress in what God is now doing. This by itself is a validation of all that takes place within this movement and within its churches. In America, it has always been hard to quarrel with success; it is even more futile when there are those who are convinced that the success has been divinely produced. Yet, if one understands modernity, it is not difficult to imagine that much of what is vaunted as the Spirit’s work may have causes that are rather more natural. Nor is it difficult to understand that where a religion is busy accommodating itself to culture there will be a period of success before the disillusionment sets in. In the end, those who promote the sort of Christianity that accommodates the culture always have to answer the question as to what they are offering in Christ that

cannot be had from purely secular sources.”⁶ Seeking visions or striving to receive some kind of special revelation or speaking in tongues – are these really the Bible’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit?⁷ The key to understanding the New Testament view of the Spirit’s work is to see that his purpose is identical with the Father’s – namely, to see glory and praise come to the Son.”⁸

We direct our attention today to the deity of the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. There are two problems that confront the Christian when dealing with most non-trinitarians (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses) respecting the Holy Spirit: the denial of His *personality* and the denial of His *deity*. It should be noted, however, that if His *Deity* is seen, then His *personality* is by the nature of His *Deity*, irrefutable. This study will seek to examine the following topics pertaining to the Holy Spirit: (1) His attributes, (2) His actions, (3) His titles, and (4) His worship and glory.

- I. **ATTRIBUTES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The New Testament expressly affirms His personality. He has *intellect* and *understanding* (1 Cor. 2:10-13); He has a *mind* (Rom. 8:27; Acts 15:28); He has *sensibility* (Eph. 4:30, comp. w/Isa. 63:10); and He has a *will* (1 Cor. 12:11).

A. *Divine Attributes.*

1. Omnipresent – Ps. 139:7, 8
2. Omniscient – 1 Cor. 2:10, 11 comp. w/Isa. 40:13-14
3. Omnipotent – Mic. 3:8; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13, 19

NOTE: The Holy Spirit’s role in creation – Ps. 33:6.

4. Eternality – Heb. 9:14 comp. w/Rom. 16:26, where the same word, *aiōmpi* is used of God.

NOTE: God is according to His nature “Spirit” (Jn. 4:24), and He is “Holy” (Isa. 6:3); but the Holy Spirit is clearly distinguished from God the Father, and God the Son, He stands in the most intimate of relationships with both. He is called the “Holy Spirit” no less than ninety-three times in the New Testament. Rev. 15:4 declares of the Lord God Almighty, “. . . Thou only are holy.” This is the very nature and property of God. Besides “Holy,” other adjectives which describe God are used of the Holy Spirit; He is the “Spirit of Truth” (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13); He is the “Spirit of Grace” (Heb. 10:29); He is the “Spirit of Glory” (1 Pet. 4:14); and He merits that most significant adjective “*one*” (Eph. 4:4). George Smeaton, one of the truly great Scottish theologians of the 19th century, correctly noted, “By the Holy Spirit the apostle did not mean, as some have thought, a mere title of God or of Christ. He meant and taught the personal Holy Ghost, distinct from the Father and the Son, but partaker of the same numerical divine nature. He referred to the Spirit sent forth on His mission as the guide and teacher of the Christian Church, whose fellowship as a divine person was invoked in the apostolic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14) as the great gift of the Christian Church. He reminded the Corinthians, who were so favoured with a supply of supernatural endowments as to come behind in no gift, that they were the temple of God and inhabited by the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), and then subjoins a warning against defiling it (ver. 17).”⁹

- II. **THE ACTIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** He does only what God can do. We have already seen His role in creation of the universe (cf. also Ps. 104:30).

A. *In Redemption.*

1. He convicts of sin – Jn. 16:8-11
2. He is the agent in the New Birth – Jn. 3:1-8
3. He indwells believers – Jn. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19
4. He sanctifies believers – 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 10:14, 13:12

5. He inspired the writers of Scripture – 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21
6. He anointed and empowered the Son for His work – Jn. 3:34; Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:19; Lk. 3:21, 22; Jn. 1:32, 33; Lk. 4:14 comp. w/Isa. 61:1. He glorified the Son – Jn. 16:14
7. He was the active agent in the incarnation – Mt. 1:18, 20; Lk. 1:35
8. He is also linked with the Father and Son (one name) in baptism – Mt. 28:19

III. **HIS TITLES.** We have noted the various adjectives attached to Him; He is specifically called by other titles which bear directly upon His Deity.

- A. **Comforter or Advocate.** James 14:15; Jn. 15:26; 16:13, 14 and 1 Jn. 2:1 – in this capacity He replaces the earthly Jesus.

NOTE: An influence could never be described either as a counselor or as an advocate; nor could an influence replace a person. The Greek word trans. *Comforter* is *paraklētos* – lit. “one called in alongside of.” Furthermore, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “another.” *Allos* comforter. *Allos* refers to another, *just like myself* (not *heteros*, meaning different from or unlike – comp. w/Gal. 1:6).

- B. **Lord.** (2 Cor. 3:16-18), by such He is recognized as Jehovah – the ref. to Ex. 34:29-35 and Moses’ personal encounter with Jehovah; and *both* the Spirit and the Son are clearly identified with Jehovah God. Comp. also 2 Sam. 22:2,3 with Acts 1:16; Acts 28:25 and Lk. 1:68-70.

IV. **HIS WORSHIP AND GLORY.** In connection with this, we should note two very important texts.

- A. Acts 5:3, 4 – lying to the Holy Spirit is a very serious thing (how can sin be committed against an influence?!) because it is said to be lying to *God!*
- B. Matt. 12:31-32 – blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin.

NOTE: *Blasphēmia* – lit. to speak against God, to slander or insult God. The word is a compound of *blaptō*, to harm or injure, and *phēmia*, to speak. In the LXX the word is *always* used directly or against the majesty of God. In the New Testament the word is used in the exact same way. The Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy (cf. Lk. 5:21 and esp. Mt. 26:65), and when Jesus made the statement in Mt. 12:32-32, He was declaring in the clearest language the Deity of the Holy Spirit. But to the question, if blasphemy against the Son of Man can be forgiven (cf. Lk. 12:10 and Mk. 3:28), then why the eternal nature of the sin against the Holy Spirit? Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God. We must note the context – the expulsion of demons by Jesus – the accusation that Jesus did this by the power of Satan – the denial of the power and greatness of the Spirit of God – and, while sin against the Son of Man, veiled as He was in the incarnation, could be forgiven, to attribute to Satan the work of the Spirit of God betrayed a defiant resistance to the Holy Spirit. (We must also note that these were men who were trained in the Old Testament Scriptures, and their sin was a perpetual one, cf. Mk. 3:28, where the imperfect tense is used, “They kept on saying.” The focus is on reoccurrence.)

CONCLUSION: H. B. Swete, in his important work on the Holy Spirit, observed, “As seen in the New Testament the Spirit of God is the very life and energy of God, issuing from the fountain-head of Deity; the self-consciousness of God, *exploring the depths* of the Divine heart and mind; the *Spirit of the absolute truth*, nay, *the truth* Itself; the *finger of God*, by which His work is done in the spiritual world. The life, the consciousness, the truth, the power of God is God; God living, thinking, teaching, working. But God thus manifested is in the thought of the New Testament clearly differentiated from God in His own infinitude, the fountain of the Divine life, the Father, and from God the Word and Son of the Father. The Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, although He is God. And though in His workings and gifts He is regarded as a power and a gift rather than a person, and described under figures borrowed from external and inanimate nature, yet in His workings and gifts He is regarded as a power and a gift rather than a person, and described under

figure borrowed from external and inanimate nature, yet in His own Divine life it is impossible to doubt that He possesses that which answers in some higher and to us in incomprehensible way to personality in man. Even in His relation to the Church and to the world He bears a personal name and fulfils the *role* of a personal office.”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ C. T. Bosworth, *A Compendious Anglo-Saxon and English Dictionary* (John Russell Smith, 1855), p. 103, and Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of English Language* (Oxford, 1911), p. 211.

² S. B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (IVP, 1996), p. 15.

³ The phrase was coined by church growth pioneer and Fuller Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner in 1985 to describe the invasion of Charismatic emphasis into the rank and file of Evangelicalism. Cf. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S.M. Burgess, G. B. McGee (Zondervan, 1988), p. 875.

⁴ Harvard professor Harvey Cox, in his work *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Addison Wesley, 1995), says the struggle for the soul of Christianity is between “fundamentalism” (which he identifies with belief in the verbal inerrancy of Scripture and the emphasis of the Protestant Reformation) and “experientialism” which emphasizes a wide array of intuitive, less analytical spiritualities of which Pentecostalism is representative (pp. 300-319). Cox clearly hopes that “experientialism wins out. Jack Deere, in his book, *Surprised By the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), makes this rather boastful statement: “I believe that ultimately the Lord wants to change the whole church. I believe that in my lifetime the majority of the church is going to believe in and practice the gifts of the Spirit. All of the current statistical evidence from church growth studies indicates that the church is moving swiftly and inevitably to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. The church is returning to its first-century heritage. I am completely convinced that until the whole church embraces the gifts of the Spirit, we are losing a significant measure of our effectiveness.” (p. 173).

⁵ Lane Dennis cited by John Armstrong in *Viewpoint* (March/April 1997), Vol. No. 2), p. 2.

⁶ D. F. Wells, *No Place for Truth Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 173-174.

⁷ “It were a dangerous error to suppose that the Spirit comforts his people, by infusing peace and joy and hope into their hearts without the use of the ordinary means of grace, or separate and apart from his other fruits and operations as their teacher and sanctifier.” James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (The Banner of Truth, 1966), p. 280.

⁸ Packer, *The Apostle’s Creed* (Tyndale, 1984), p. 70.

⁹ George Smeaton, *the Doctrine of The Holy Spirit* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 65.

¹⁰ H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in The New Testament* (rpt. Baker, 1976), p. 293.