

# THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you...he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” [John 14:16-17, 26](#)

As we’ve seen already, God created us to know Him as our Father. Even when our sin separated us from Him, He loved us so much that He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. In putting our trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross, we’re restored to right relationship with our Father in Heaven. What good news!

But it’s even better than that! So often, the gospel message we hear, and the teaching we receive on living the Christian life, leave out any reference to the Holy Spirit. Many Christians can identify with the disciples Paul met in Ephesus, who told him, “...we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit!” [Acts 19:2](#)

Why is it that the Holy Spirit has so often been ignored or misunderstood in the Church and the world? It could be because He doesn’t seem as tangible to people as God the Father and Jesus, both of whom we can “picture” (even if that picture isn’t particularly accurate) and, therefore, relate to on some level. Or perhaps it’s because we’re not sure what He actually does. Or maybe it’s because we’re uncomfortable with the supernatural dynamic associated with the Holy Spirit’s activity.

In fact, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in every aspect of us becoming and being a Christian. Therefore, in this session and the two that follow, we’ll look in some detail at who He is and what He does. Let’s start with a couple of essential facts about the Holy Spirit.

## HE IS A PERSON

The personhood of God the Father and Jesus Christ is challenging enough for most of us to grasp, but it can be even more difficult for us to see the Holy Spirit as a person. Perhaps part of the problem is that He’s called the Holy Spirit (and in older translations of the Bible, He is referred to as the Holy Ghost, which can add to the strangeness). We can tend to think of a spirit as a “force” or “essence”—an “it” rather than a “He.” However, the Holy Spirit is never referred to in the Bible as “it” (so let’s determine never to refer to Him that way ourselves), but as “He” or “Him.”

It's also important to know that when Jesus tells the disciples that the Father would give them “another Helper” (John 14:16), the Greek word translated “another” signifies “another of exactly the same kind.” Jesus was—and is—a person, so the Helper to come must also be a person in order to be “exactly the same kind.”

Quite apart from how He is referred to, His interaction with and response to us shows that He is no mere “force” or “thing.” For example:

**HE MAKES JUDGMENTS** — “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:” Acts 15:28

**HE SPEAKS** — “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...” Acts 13:2

**HE LEADS** — “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

**HE INTERCEDES** — “...the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27

**HE CAN BE INSULTED, GRIEVED, AND LIED TO** — “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has...outraged the Spirit of grace?” Hebrews 10:29

“...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30

“...Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...” Acts 5:3

## HE IS GOD

Having seen clearly from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a person, we must remember that He is not just any person—He is God! This brings us to something very important—the nature of and relationship between God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. We'll come back to focusing on the Holy Spirit shortly, but first we need to touch on this even bigger subject.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

In Deuteronomy 6:4, we see the declaration, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” This was an important truth for the people of Israel to grasp, surrounded as they were by nations that promoted the idea that there were multiple “gods.”

However, even in the Old Testament, it was clear that there was something intriguingly “plural” about the one true God (and perhaps that's why the declaration in Deuteronomy 6:4 had to be made). For example, right at the beginning of the Bible, we see the “dialogue” that God has regarding His intention in creating us:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’” Genesis 1:26

Who is He talking to? Who else made us? In whom else's image were we made? Of course, God alone made us, in His image alone, as Genesis 1:27 goes on to clarify:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

The “dialogue” was, in fact, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, both of whom were actively involved in creation, as we see in (for example) Colossians 1:16 and Genesis 1:1-2. So God alone created us, acting in the fullness of who He is.

The oneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is often referred to as “the Trinity.” This is not a word found in the Bible, but is a term used by the Church through the ages to describe the truth found in Scripture that, although there is only one God, He manifests and acts in three distinct persons. This mystery is evident all the way through the Bible. We’ve seen it already in [Genesis 1](#), but let’s look at a few other scriptures that show it:

## ONENESS IN LORDSHIP

As we have seen in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), there is one Lord. And who is that one Lord?

He is God the Father:

“For you are our Father...**you, O LORD, are our Father**, our Redeemer from of old is your name.” [Isaiah 63:16](#)

But consider the following statements:

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ** is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” [Philippians 2:10-11](#)

“Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from **the Lord who is the Spirit.**” [2 Corinthians 3:17-18](#)

So there is only one Lord, and that one Lord is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

## ONENESS IN IDENTITY

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” [Matthew 28:18-20](#)

It’s interesting that Jesus is commanding the disciples to baptize in “**the name**” (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Though they are three, they have one name. In Scripture, names have particular significance and convey aspects of identity and nature. This is especially true of God Himself, and this statement confirms the nature of the triune God as “one.”

We also see this oneness in identity in the Old Testament, for example in [Isaiah 9:6](#):

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**”

We often hear this scripture read at Christmas, and we know that the child/son referred to is Jesus. But it says that He would be called “**Wonderful Counselor.**” As we’ve already seen, the Holy Spirit is referred to (by Jesus) as the “Counselor.” What’s more, we see that Jesus will also be called “**Mighty God**” and “**Everlasting Father.**” So the Son is one with the Spirit and the Father.

“...I WILL ASK THE FATHER, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER HELPER, TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER, EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH...”

John 14:16



## ONENESS IN PURPOSE

Even where Scripture emphasizes the distinction of the persons of the Trinity, the singleness of purpose remains evident. For example, the following verses show how each person of the Trinity is involved in the single act of giving us life.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...made us alive together with Christ...” [Ephesians 2:4-5](#)

“For the bread of God is he [Jesus] who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” [John 6:33](#)

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” [Romans 8:11](#)

And the following passage shows us how each person of the Trinity works in and through the people of God:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#)

## GOD IN ALL HIS FULLNESS

Though the reality of the Trinity is clear from Scripture, it is still difficult to grasp with our minds. Thankfully, this needn't rob us of the joy of experiencing the wonderful triunity of God, as He expresses Himself to us and blesses us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” [2 Corinthians 13:14](#)

So, keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit is God, let's look further at what He has done and continues to do.

## THE ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The fact that many Christians are ignorant of the Holy Spirit's role and work is surprising bearing in mind the abundant evidence of it in Scripture.

We've already seen in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the world and of man. We see Him at work thereafter in and through the people of God, empowering, enabling and equipping them in diverse ways. Look at examples in [Exodus 31:1-5](#) (Bezalel anointed for artistic craftsmanship), [Numbers 11:16-17 & 24-26](#) (Moses and the elders enabled to prophesy), [Judges 6:14-16 & 34](#) (Gideon leading the people to victory), [Judges 15:14-15](#) (Samson empowered for a fight), and [Isaiah 61:1-3](#) (Isaiah anointed to proclaim good news and do good works in the name of the Lord).

However active though the Holy Spirit was in the time of the Old Testament, He only came upon particular people at particular times for particular tasks. It's interesting that in the incident recounted in [Numbers 11](#), Moses goes on to exclaim, “Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

Maybe Moses didn't know it, but this desire was prophetic. God did indeed have something greater in store for His people, as He later specifically promised:

“...I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” [Joel 2:28-29](#)



And what's more, He promised that His Spirit would not just come upon people temporarily (for a particular time and task), but would be in them and would change them from the inside out:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)

How would the Holy Spirit be able to reside within unholy people? Only by the cleansing work of Jesus on the cross. Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see the significant role of the Holy Spirit in the coming of Jesus.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The virgin Mary became pregnant as a direct work of the Holy Spirit ([Luke 1:35](#)). Surrounding this event, there was a dramatic increase of the Holy Spirit's activity.

In [Luke 1:15](#), the angel of the Lord tells Zechariah that the son he was going to have, John the Baptist, would be “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.” His wife Elizabeth, pregnant with John, was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary visited her ([Luke 1:41](#)), and after John was born, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied ([Luke 1:67](#)). We also see the Holy Spirit working prophetically through the lives of Simeon ([Luke 2:25-35](#)) and Anna ([Luke 2:36-38](#)).

Even though this accelerating activity of the Holy Spirit was still only in specific and isolated incidents, it speaks of the promised outpouring that would come through Jesus.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

Though Jesus had been conceived by the Spirit, His public ministry began with an empowering experience of the Holy Spirit when He was baptized:

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” [Luke 3:21-22](#)

Jesus is described thereafter as being “full of the Holy Spirit” and as being “led by the Spirit in the wilderness” ([Luke 4:1](#)), where he was able to resist the Devil's tempting. We are told that he then returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” ([Luke 4:14](#)). He “went public” with his ministry and mission in the synagogue in Nazareth when He read out the words from [Isaiah 61](#) to which we referred earlier, declaring himself to be the fulfillment of that scripture:

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” [Luke 4:17-21](#)

In this, Jesus declared that the power in which He would operate would be by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.



## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MISSION OF JESUS

It's interesting that Scripture shows us that the Holy Spirit was involved not just in the birth and ministry of Jesus, but also in His pivotal act of dying on the cross for us:

“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” [Hebrews 9:14](#)

By His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the price for our sins. But His mission goes beyond even this. See John the Baptist's declaration of what God had revealed to him regarding Jesus:

“And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” [John 1:32-34](#)

So Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak, minister, die, and rise from the dead, would ultimately “baptize” us in the Holy Spirit. We'll look more at this wonderful truth in the next session. For now, having mentioned earlier the part that the Holy Spirit played in the birth of Jesus, let's look at the role He has in our new birth.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

“And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:” [John 16:8](#)

The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of unbelievers to bring them to a place where they recognize their need for salvation. It's only then, by the Holy Spirit, that someone can be born again:

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” [John 3:5-8](#)

And it's not just what the Holy Spirit does in us when we're born again; it's what He brings us into. By Him, we become part of the Body of Christ:

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” [1 Corinthians 12:13](#)

So we receive new life by Him, and are brought by Him into the life of the Body of Christ. And that's just the beginning! In the next session, we will look more at what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* by Bruce A. Ware