

Life in the Spirit¹

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Bruce Milne – “The Holy Spirit is...none other than that member of the eternal Godhead who brings to bear in the life of God’s people the fruits of the victory won by Christ in his life, death and glorification.
(Know the Truth, 180)

I. THE TRINITY

WAYNE GRUDEM – “We may define the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”
(Systematic Theology, 236)

A. One God

Judaism and Christianity have always been clearly monotheistic, that is they believe, according to the OT and NT scriptures, that there is only one God. The fundamental principle of the first and greatest command is that one God and one God alone would receive our undivided love and loyalty (**Matthew 22:34-40, Exodus 20:1-6**). Scripture clearly references that there is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus....

James 2:19 - You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

B. Three Persons

In a variety of places in scripture we see God referred to as the Father (Yahweh), the Son (**Romans 9:5, Philippians 2:5-6, Titus 2:23, 2 Peter 1:1**) and the Holy Spirit (see

¹ For this study, we leaned heavily on a discipleship class from our sister church, *Crossway Community Church* in Charlotte.

below). As the church puzzled through this question, they came to the following conclusion – God is and has always been one God in essence or being and three in person. The Nicene Creed (as modified in 381 A.D. in Constantinople) states it this way:

I believe in one GOD THE FATHER Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, pp. 58–59.
(Nicene Creed)

We see these three persons manifest together in several instances in scripture.

1. At Creation – “Let us make Man in our image” (**Genesis 1:26**, see also **Genesis 3:22, 11:7, Isaiah 6:8**)
2. At the Incarnation – The Father announced that the Spirit would come upon Mary and that she would give birth to the Son. (**Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-38**)
3. At Jesus’ Baptism – The Father spoke from heaven about the Son while the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son. (**Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22**)
4. Regarding the Promise of the Spirit – The Son asks the Father to send the Spirit to be with His disciples. (**John 14:16-17**)
5. In the Great Commission – Baptism is to be in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. (**Matthew 28:19**)

C. Common Mistakes Regarding the Trinity

1. Not three Gods.
2. Not one God who takes different forms at different times.
3. Not one God who contains three parts.
4. Not one primary God and two subordinate Gods.
5. Not one God who begot another being who then became another God.

LOUIS BERKOFF – “It is especially when we reflect on the relation of the three persons to the divine essence that all analogies fail us and we become deeply conscious of the fact that the trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. It is the incomprehensible glory of the Godhead.” (*Systematic Theology*, 88)

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT

SINCLAIR FERGUSON – “Most Christians readily and warmly respond to the description of Jesus as the Son of God not only because of his humanity (Jesus), but also because the designation ‘Son’ indicates a relational identity (son-father) with which we are familiar. In addition, when, in Christ, we learn to call God ‘Father’, that name conveys a rich kaleidoscope of images which helps us to understand and respond to him as the one who governs, guides, provides for, guards and loves his children. 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?” (*The Holy Spirit*, 15-16)

A. The Holy Spirit is a Person

The Hebrew (*ruach*) and Greek (*pneuma*) words used for spirit mean breath. In their most fundamental form they express the idea of power, energy and life. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the Holy Spirit is simply an impersonal power or influence proceeding from God. Rather He is a person (albeit a person without a body) who can and does relate personally to the Father and Son and to mankind.

1. Personal Qualities are Ascribed to the Holy Spirit

a. Intelligence

John 14:26 - But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 15:26 - "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

b. Will

Acts 16:7 - And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

1 Corinthians 12:11 - All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

c. Affections

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

B. The Holy Spirit is God

Not only is the Holy Spirit a person, but He is a person equal in substance and being to the Father and the Son. He is God the Holy Spirit.

1. He is Given Divine Names

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (ESV) – 17 Now the **Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 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**.

Acts 5:3-4 - Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the **Holy Spirit** and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to **God**."

1 Corinthians 3:16 - Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...**2 Peter 1:21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along **by the Holy Spirit**.

2. Divine Attributes are Ascribed to Him

a. Omnipresence

Psalms 139:7-10 - Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

b. Omniscience

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 - For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

c. Omnipotence

Romans 15:19 - by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ....

d. Eternity

Hebrews 9:14 - 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.

3. Divine Works are Performed by Him

a. Creation

Genesis 1:1-2 - In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Job 26:13 - By his wind (ruach) the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

Job 33:4 - The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

b. Providence

Psalms 104:30 - When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

c. Redemption

Titus 3:5 - He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...

4. Divine Honor is Paid to Him

Matthew 28:19 - 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....

2 Corinthians 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

Even though Father, Son and Spirit are equal in substance and glory, there is a differentiation in their roles or work among the Godhead. While we must always be careful not to draw too strict a dividing line, we can accurately generalize in saying that the Father primarily initiates, the Son primarily accomplishes, and the Spirit primarily applies the work of God among us. This is particularly true of the work of redemption.

WAYNE GRUDEM – “From the very beginning of creation we have an indication that the Holy Spirit’s work is to complete and sustain what God the Father has planned and what God the Son has begun.”
(Systematic Theology, 635)

WAYNE GRUDEM – “The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church.”
(Systematic Theology, 634)

We can summarize the work of the Spirit as threefold: He enlivens, instructs and empowers.

I. ENLIVENS

John 6:63 - It is the Spirit who gives life....

NICENE CREED – “And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life”

A. Creation

1. Of the world

Genesis 1:2 - The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Holy Spirit is pictured here as providing energy and motion, bringing order and the potential for life into the universe.

2. Of man

Genesis 2:7 - Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Job 33:4 - The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (See also **Psalms 139:13** and **Acts 17:25**)

Acts 17:28 - 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

B. Incarnation

Luke 1:35 - And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy— the Son of God.

Matthew 1:20 - But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

C. Resurrection

Romans 8:11 - 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.

D. Regeneration

Regeneration can be defined as the work of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings persons into living union with Christ, changing their hearts so that they who were spiritually dead become spiritually alive, now able and willing to repent of sin, believe the gospel, and serve the Lord. **John 3** refers to this as being born again or born of the Spirit.

Col. 2:13 - And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...

Titus 3:5 - He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...

E. Revival

To revive means to bring back to life and health. In the history of the church there have been many revivals. **Ezekiel 37:1-14** gives us a picture of revival where the valley of the dry bones are revived by the breath (ruach or spirit) of God.

Ezekiel 37:14 – "And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

II. INSTRUCTS

Instructs is a bit of an inadequate word. Perhaps a better thing to say is that He makes God known. This is vital when we understand that God is unknowable by any human ability or effort. Even in our pre- and post-sinful states we are finite and mortal, He is infinite and immortal. We are sinful and darkened in our hearts and minds.

JOHN CALVIN – “His essence is incomprehensible; so that His divinity wholly escapes all human senses.”

And yet Christianity is a religion of personal relationship with God. The scriptures themselves say...

John 17:3 - And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

How can this be then? It is because God has graciously chosen to reveal Himself to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

R. C. SPROUL – “Everything we know about Christianity has been revealed to us by God...If we wish to know Him in truth, we must rely on what He tells us about Himself.”

A. The Word

God has given us a complete and infallible record of all He wishes to reveal to us through His written word. His nature, plans, and commands. The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in this process.

1. Revelation/Inspiration

Revelation means that God personally discloses Himself to man. The problem is, how does He do this with complete clarity and accuracy? The answer is that He worked in certain men, through the Holy Spirit to ensure these things. This working is known as inspiration.

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness....

2 Peter 1:21 - For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 - But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

2. Illumination

Illumination is the action of the Holy Spirit especially in relation to scripture, by which the meaning of scripture is made effectively to shine upon the heart and mind of the reader or hearer.

1 John 2:27 - But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything—and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you—abide in him.

1 Corinthians 2:12 - Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

Ephesians 1:17-18 - ...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...

B. Fellowship

2 Corinthians 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In an unexplainable way we experience God outside of our physical senses or intellect – “I felt His presence” or “He told me”, etc. We don’t just read about and mentally understand Him but we experience Him. (Remembering that these things must be judged by the normative revelation of the scriptures.)

MILLARD ERICKSON – “The Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer.” (*Christian Theology*, 846)

1. Awareness

By the Spirit at regeneration we become alive to God, i.e. sensitive to and aware of His presence in and with us in a way that we were not before.

John 14:17 - The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 - These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have

received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

2. Communication

We have been reconciled, brought to God, come into His presence, etc. We speak to God and He speaks to us. The Spirit helps us to pray, we worship "by the Spirit of God (**Philippians 3:3**), and "In spirit and truth" (**John 4**), we experience words of prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, we hear the still small voice. He guides us, counsels us, comforts us, encourages us, convicts us, rebukes us, etc. All without audible words.

Romans 8:14 - For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (See also, **Acts 8:29, 10:19, 11:12**)

Ephesians 2:18 - For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

3. Assurance

How do I really know I am saved? How can I be sure that what I am thinking is of the Lord? None of this seems very concrete. These can be difficult questions and we must never discount leaders and Christian friends as means of grace to help confirm or question our thinking, but God intends us to gain much assurance from the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:13 - By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

Galatians 4:6 - And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Ephesians 1:13 - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit....

4. Affection

As the Holy Spirit reveals, He also stirs our affections. Our relationship with God is not a cold technical one, but one that reaches to the depth of our hearts. He particularly gives us a deeper understanding of the gospel that rightly motivates our affection for and obedience to the Lord.

Romans 5:5 - Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

III. EMPOWERS

John 14:15-16 - "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever...."

A. For Holiness

CHARLES HODGE – "He is also predominately called the Holy Spirit, to indicate both his nature and operations. He is absolutely holy in his nature and the cause of holiness in all creatures."

(Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, 522)

To be holy is to be separated or set apart and to be morally pure. It is used almost interchangeably in the scriptures with words sanctify and righteous and all their derivatives. When we are converted, we are sanctified or made holy in the sense of being set apart for God, identified as one of His people. To be justified means we are declared not guilty or holy in God's sight by virtue of our union with Christ and His saving work applied in our lives. This speaks of our judicial standing before God but not the actual state of our character. This is where the second aspect of holiness comes in.

Thanks to our conversion, union and justification, we enter into a lifelong process of being made actually holy in our character and conduct. This process is known as sanctification. Both aspects of holiness are works of the Holy Spirit. It is the second aspect that we are examining here. The new life of the Spirit living in us motivates and empowers our quest for holiness.

1 Corinthians 6:11 - And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - 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. (See also **Romans 8:1-13**)

How does he do this?

Philippians 2:12-13 - Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation

with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

1. He affects our wills

He produces an awareness and conviction of sins, hatred for evil and love for good, delight in obedience, and a love for God which motivates our obedience. He is constantly influencing our hearts, minds and wills.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - 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.

2. He affects our actions.

He is bearing spiritual fruit in our lives, He is the source of power to mortify (put to death) our sinful flesh and resist temptation. He is renewing us, transforming us into the image of Christ and imparting the life of Christ to us.

Romans 8:13 - For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

He does this in cooperation with us but we must realize that our cooperation is impossible without His work.

JERRY BRIDGES – “His work lies behind all our work and makes our work possible.” (*Transforming Grace, 115*)

LOUIS BERKOFF – “Though man is privileged to co-operate with the Spirit of God, he can do this only in virtue of the strength which the Spirit imparts to him from day to day.” (*Systematic Theology, 535*)

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

B. For Service

BRUCE MILNE – “The deepest word which can be spoken about Christian ministry in all its forms is that it is nothing other than the ministry of the risen Lord among and through his people.” (*Know the Truth*, 226)

Ephesians 1:22-23 - And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The significance of being Christ’s body is that we now act as his representative (His hands, feet, voice, etc.) here on earth. In order to do this effectively He gives us the Spirit to empower service.

1. Outside the church – witness

Luke 24:45-49 - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Because of the Holy Spirit their witness was characterized by...

a. Effective speech

1 Corinthians 2:4 - My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

b. Mighty works

Hebrews 2:4 - God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

c. Guidance

Acts 16:6-10 - And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

d. Boldness

Acts 4:31 - And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

2. Inside the church – Spiritual gifts

Just as the Holy Spirit gives us power to witness, He give us gifts to build up the church. Just as any holiness we have is a result of His work in us, any effectiveness we have, have had or will have in ministering is a result of His anointing in our lives.

1 Peter 4:10 - As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace....

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 - 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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

NEXT Week: A more in-depth look at Spiritual Gifts