

The Personality Of The Holy Spirit

Memory Text: “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 things that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

Setting The Stage: Who is the Holy Spirit? In the book, “Motherhood Is Stranger Than Fiction,” a child is trying to grapple with the Biblical idea of the Godhead - the Trinity. Not sure about how Jesus and the Holy Spirit are related he asks his parent, “If Jesus is alive, what’s all this about the Holy Ghost?” Yes, if Jesus is alive and the heavenly Father is well, what is this about the Holy Ghost?

What this curious child expressed is at the heart of people’s misunderstanding about the Holy Spirit. Is it merely the spirit of God, the spirit of Jesus? Is it an intelligence or an influence; a person or mere presence?

Non-trinitarian views about the Holy Spirit generally fall into one of two categories:

- 1) Some groups believe that the Holy Spirit is a separate being from God the Father and God the Son, and is “one” with them in some other sense. The LDS fall within this category.
- 2) Others believe that the Holy Spirit refers to some aspect (or aspects) of God such as His “spirit,” an “active force, His “mind,” or is a term used to refer to God when He acts in a particular role. This is referred to as Modalism, Sabellianism, or Monarchianism. Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses fall within this category.

Christadelphians believe that the phrase “Holy Spirit” refers to God's character or mind, depending on the context. The LDS consider the Holy Spirit as a third and individual member of the Godhead. But the term “Holy Spirit” can also have other meanings dependant on the context. To the LDS, the Holy Ghost has a body of spirit with no flesh and bones, unlike the Father and the Son who are said to be resurrected individuals having glorified immortalized bodies of flesh and bone. Jehovah’s Witness’s believe that the Holy Spirit is God's active force, and do not typically capitalize the term.

The Baha’i faith has the concept of the Most Great Spirit, seen as the bounty of God. It is usually used to describe the descent of the Spirit of God upon the messengers/prophets of God, which are known as Manifestations of God, and include among other Jesus, Muhammad, and Baha’u’llah (Ba-hoe-a-la). In Bahá’í belief the Holy Spirit is the conduit through which the wisdom of God becomes directly associated with his messenger. This view rejects the idea that the Holy Spirit is a partner to God in the Godhead, but rather is a pure reflection of God's attributes.

Holy Spirit in Islam is an agent of divine action or communication commonly identified with the angel Gabriel or Ruhul Qudus but also with the created spirit from God by which he enlivened Adam, made Mary pregnant with Jesus, and inspired the angels and the prophets. The belief in Trinity is explicitly forbidden by the Qur'an and called a grave sin. The same applies to any idea of the duality of God (Allah).

In Judaism, the idea of God as a duality or trinity is heretical. Nonetheless, the term Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) is found frequently in Talmudic and Midrashic literature. In some cases it signifies prophetic inspiration. The Rabbinic "Holy Spirit," has a certain degree of personification, but it remains, "a quality belonging to God, one of his attributes."

As a movement that developed out of Christianity, Rastafari has its own unique interpretation of the Holy Spirit. Although there are several slight variations, they generally state that it is Haile Selassie (Ethiopia's emperor from 1916-1930) who embodies both God the Father and God the Son, while the Holy (or rather, "*Hola*") Spirit is to be found within Rasta believers, and within every human being. Rastas also say that the true church is the human body, and that it is this church (or "structure") that contains the Holy Spirit.

Can any of these be right? Is the Holy Spirit just an inanimate presence, an influence, an extension of God's personality? The problem of the personality of the Holy Spirit among Christians may stem from the fact that we easily "visualize" the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit is considered so mysterious, invisible, and secret that personality is questioned.

The question about the Holy Spirit's personality is not merely technical, academic, or impractical. It's vitally important. If He is a divine person, and we think of Him as an impersonal force, we are robbing a divine person of the deference, honor, and love that is due Him. And if the Holy Spirit is mere force, we are likely to get a hold of it and use it. But if He is a person then we would be in a good position to study to know how to yield to Him, to know how He might use us.

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force or presence. Personality doesn't require the limits of humanity. Four things are predicated of personality: 1) Will; 2) Intelligence; 3) Power; 4) Love. Personality therefore involves a self-conscious, self-knowing, self-willing, and self-determining being. Does the Holy Spirit measure up?

The early Christian believer viewed Him as a person. Notice Acts 15:28: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Christ also spoke of Him as a distinct person. John 16:14 reads, "He will glorify Me for He will take of what is Mine and declare it unto you." Other Scriptures referring to the triune God describe the Spirit as a person (see Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Holy Spirit also has a personality. He strives (Gen. 6:3), teaches (Luke 12:12), convicts (John 16:8), directs church affairs (Acts 13:2), helps and intercedes (Rom 8:26), inspires (2 Pet. 1:21), and sanctifies (1 Pet. 1:2). It is important to highlight that these functions cannot be performed by a mere force, power, influence or attribute of God. Only a person can do these things.

So the Holy Spirit is a person. There is no question about that. But is He God? Is He equal with the Father and the Son? The Bible views the Holy Spirit as God. Peter told Ananias that, in lying to the Holy Spirit, He had actually lied to God (Acts 5:3, 4). Jesus defined the unpardonable sin as “blasphemy against the Spirit.” (Matt. 12:31, 32) This could only be true if the Holy Spirit was God.

Divine attributes are associated with the Holy Spirit. He is life (Rom. 8:2). He is truth (John 16:13). He shares the love of God (Rom. 5:5). He is holy (Eph. 4:30). He is omnipotent, distributing spiritual gifts “to each one individually as He wills.” (1 Cor. 12:11) He is omnipresent, abiding with His people forever (John 14:16). He is omniscient, knowing the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10, 11).

The works of God are connected with the Holy Spirit. Creation and resurrection both involve Him. Job said, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.” (Job 33:4) David piggybacked on that and said, “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created.” (Ps. 104:30) And we must remember that it takes a God, not an impersonal presence or power to bring Christ to Mary. At Pentecost the Spirit also made Jesus very real to all willing recipients.

The Holy Spirit is considered equal with the Father and the Son in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19), the apostolic blessing (2 Cor. 13:14), and the spiritual gifts passage (1 Cor. 12:4-6). So from eternity He lived within the Godhead as the third member. The Father, Son and Spirit are equally self-existent. And though each is equal, an economy of function operates within the Trinity.

Perhaps the best way to understand the truth of the Holy Spirit is to see Him through Jesus. You see when the Spirit comes He doesn’t come in His own right, carrying His own credentials. He doesn’t say pray to Me, worship Me, come to Me, live for Me. His activity in history has and does center in Christ’s mission of salvation to the world. The Holy Spirit was actively involved in Christ’s birth (Luke 1:35), confirmed His public ministry at baptism (Matt. 3:16, 17), and brought the reality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and resurrection to humanity (Rom. 8:11).

It seems the Scriptures indicate the Spirit’s role is one of executor. When the Father gave His Son to the world He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-20). The Holy Spirit came to complete the plan, to make it a reality.

He was present at creation and His intimate involvement is clearly highlighted in Scripture (Gen 1:2). Life’s origin and maintenance depends on His operation; His

departure means death. The Bible says that if God “should gather Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust.” (Job 34:14, 15) We also see reflections of the Spirit’s creative work within each person who open’s themselves up to God (Rom. 5:5).

Although the Holy Spirit has been an active agent in the creation of the world, Christ’s incarnation and man’s re-creation, **Scripture ultimately portrays Him as the promised Spirit.** Let me explain: We were intended to be the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve’s sin separated them from both the garden and the indwelling Spirit. That separation continues – the enormity of wickedness before the Flood led God to declare “My Spirit shall not always strive with ma forever.” (Gen. 6:3)

In the Old Testament the Spirit equipped certain individuals to perform certain tasks, as in the case of Baalam, Gideon, Samson, Saul, etc. At times He is actually described as being in persons as in the case of the skilled workman Bezaleel and some of the Israelites during their wandering through the wilderness. There is no question that believers have always had an awareness of His presence, but prophecy predicted a pouring out of the Spirit “on flesh” (Joel 2:28) – a time when a greater manifestation of the Spirit would usher in a new age.

While the world remained in the hands of the usurper, the pouring out of the fullness of the Spirit had to wait. But wait for what? Before the Spirit could be poured out upon all flesh Christ needed to carry out His earthly ministry and make the atoning sacrifice.

Pointing to Christ’s ministry a Spirit ministry, John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptize you with water [but He] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 3:11) But the gospels don’t reveal Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Just hours before His death, Jesus promised His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17).

But when did the promise of the Spirit come? He wasn’t received when Jesus died on crucifixion Friday – only darkness and lightening. It wasn’t until His resurrection did Jesus breath the Spirit on His disciples (John 20:22). He said, “Behold, I send the promise of My father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) In Acts Luke states that this power would come in the person of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

John wrote, “The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39) In other words, the acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice by the Father was the prerequisite for the outpouring of the Spirit.

The new age broke in only when our victorious Lord was seated on heaven’s throne. Only then could He send the Holy Spirit in His fullness. After “being exalted to the

right hand of God," Peter said, He "poured out" the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, who anxiously anticipating this event, had gathered "with one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 2:33; 1:5, 14)

At Pentecost, fifty days after Calvary, the new age burst forth with all the Holy Spirit's power. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they [the disciples] were sitting...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:2-4)

The mission of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit were totally interdependent. The fullness of the Spirit could not be given until Jesus had completed His mission. And Jesus in turn was conceived by the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, performed miracles by the Spirit, offered Himself on Calvary through the Spirit, and was in part resurrected by the Spirit. Jesus was the first person to experience the fullness of the Spirit.

"The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ." (Desire of Ages, p. 805)

"The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high." (Desire of Ages, p. 669)

"Evil had been accumulating for centuries and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power." (Testimonies to Ministers, p. 392)

"The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ." (Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, pp. 62, 63)

The astounding truth is that our Lord is willing to pour out His Spirit on all who earnestly desire Him. Is that your desire today?