

THE HOLY SPIRIT – An Introduction

John 16:5-15

Most of us have heard of the airplane pilot who at 30,000 feet said to the passengers and crew, “I have good news and bad news. The bad news is we are lost. The good news is we are making excellent time.”

The Christian life is a journey. Everyday is filled with new obstacles, challenges, and temptations. At times the journey progresses quickly. At other times the pace is as slow as a turtle. The journey last a lifetime, and the worse thing that could happen is to not know exactly where you are going but to be satisfied because you are “making good time.”

As we travel this journey we need to be open to the leading of God, and God leads through the Holy Spirit. In spite of this truth—God leads through the Holy Spirit—most believers know less about the Holy Spirit than they do God the Father and Jesus His Son. Many Christians don’t understand, or misunderstand, the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit. The result is frustration, discouragement, defeatism, and luke-warmness in their spiritual lives. Living the Christian life apart from a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit is like the airline pilot who is lost but making good time.

Why is it important that we know more about the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit? Samuel Chadwick, a Methodist minister in 19th Century England, said, “The gift of the Holy Spirit is the crowning mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It was for this all the rest was. The Incarnation and Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension were all preparatory to Pentecost. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit all the rest would be

useless. The great thing in Christianity is the gift of the Spirit. The essential, vital, central element in the life of the soul and the work of the Church is the Person of the Spirit.”¹

Theologian, Arthur Pink, said, “There is no spiritual good communicated to any one but by the Spirit; whatever God in His grace works in us, it is by the Spirit. The only sin, for which there is no forgiveness, is one committed against the Spirit. How necessary is it then that we should be well instructed in the Scripture doctrine concerning Him.”²

I grew up in a church that believed in the Holy Spirit, but most of the teaching and preaching about His ministry was on what the Spirit no longer did and why He no longer did it. The attitude seemed to be if you talked about the Holy Spirit you would become emotional, or fanatical, or even worse, you would be considered a “charismatic.” As a result, I learned a lot about the Bible, about God, and about Jesus Christ, but very little about the purpose and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Sure, the Holy Spirit was important, I was taught, but all you need is Jesus.

What I have learned about the Holy Spirit has been the result of being on a journey, following God wherever He leads, longing to have an intimate relationship with Him, and finally coming to the conclusion that the way to have that intimate relationship is through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that makes my relationship with God, through faith in Jesus Christ, living, dynamic, powerful, and relevant.

¹ Samuel Chadwick, *Joyful News*, 1911. Taken from Arthur Pink’s book, *The Holy Spirit*, 7).

² Arthur Pink. *The Holy Spirit*. 7.

I believe the main reason so little is said about the Holy Spirit in non-charismatic churches is because the Spirit's work is subjective; it's not something you can see or touch. The modern world was based on rationalism and empiricism. If something could not be tested in a laboratory it was looked upon with skepticism. Truth was something that could be proved. Out of this environment came *apologetics* which explained and defended Christianity in a rational, empirical, manner. Being "filled with the Spirit," and ministering in the "power of the Spirit," was not easily explainable. Thus, being *intellectual* about something was more important than being *emotional* about something.

Today we live in a *postmodern* world. Truth in this new era is subjectivity and experience. In this postmodern world, truth is not something you can *know*, but something you have to *experience*. It is precisely because experience is seen as being more important than scientific fact that a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit is greatly needed.

The starting place in understanding the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit is understanding the very nature of God Himself.

The Doctrine of God

One day a kindergarten teacher asked a boy what he was drawing. Without pausing to look up, he said, "A picture of God." The teacher smiled and responded, "But nobody knows what God looks like." The boy carefully put down his crayon, looked her squarely in the eye, and declared, "They will when I'm finished."

It would be impossible to describe God in one sermon; but I do want to sketch an outline. Before studying the Holy Spirit there are three basics that need to be discussed about God.

1. There is only one God.

This is known as *monotheism*.³ The fact there can only be one God makes perfect sense because there can only be one all-powerful and all-knowing Being. To believe in more than one God is to believe in no gods at all.

God's basic nature is that He is a Spirit. He is personal. He is independent. He is infinite in relation to space and time. He is immutable. God's natural attributes are that He is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. His moral attributes are that He is holy, loving, and wise. God is a true God and He is the God of all Truth. God is good; He is glorious; He is majestic; He is perfect. He is One. The most important verse for a Jewish family was Deuteronomy 6:4. This verse was posted over their doors and repeated as they entered and exited the home. The first part of the verse reads, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One."

2. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God.

To say there is only one God is to say there is only one Being, or one Essence. There is only one spirit-essence, but three Persons share that one Essence equally.

³ Only three world religions claim to be monotheistic: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each share the entire Divine Essence. Each Person is not part of God. Each Person is entirely God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Water is found in solid, liquid, and gaseous forms, yet all forms are still hydrogen dioxide. A fire consists of three ingredients—heat, fuel, and oxygen—but together they form one fire. An egg has a shell, a white, and a yolk, yet it is one in its purpose and substance. Each example gives a glimpse of the Trinity, but each falls short of fully explaining the Trinity. Though helpful, each illustration falls short of describing the fullness, completeness, and complexity of God. While the yolk of an egg is *part* of the egg, the yolk is not a *complete* egg. While fire has three ingredients, individually each ingredient is not fire; and water cannot be a solid a liquid and a gas all at the same time. Each *part* of the Trinity is completely God. Each *ingredient* of the Trinity is God; and God is the Trinity all the time at the same time.

No one specific illustration adequately explains the oneness and threeness of God. But that is nothing to be feared. It is impossible for finite creatures like us to understand all there is to understand of an infinite God. The Trinity, just like the existence of God, is accepted by faith. Try to explain the Trinity and you will lose your mind; but try to deny the Trinity and you will lose your soul.

3. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each distinct Persons.

It is incorrect to say God manifested Himself as Father in the Old Testament, Son in the New Testament, and as Holy Spirit today.⁴ Each Person in the Trinity is distinct

⁴ This view of the Trinity is known as *modalism*. Modalism was introduced in the 3rd century by Sabellius. The two primary views of modalism see the names of God as names for particular periods in

from the Others, and each Person of the Trinity has inter-personal relations with the Others. Each Person of the Trinity is eternal, and each Person is equal to the Others.

The best way to explain and understand the Trinity is by saying that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three *co-eternal* and *co-equal* Persons who experience *inter-personal* relationships, existing in One Divine Essence, with each Person sharing the entire Essence.

So What?

In summary, a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit is our greatest need today. Before we can study the purpose and ministry of the Holy Spirit we must first get a solid grasp on the doctrine of God. Three basic fundamental of that doctrine are: (1) There is only One God. (2) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God. (3) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each distinct Persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three *co-eternal* and *co-equal* Persons who experience *inter-personal* relationships, existing in One Divine Essence, with each Person sharing the entire Essence.

Now the big question: **So what?** How does an understanding of God affect how I live my life today? Why should I care about the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit?

1. The more you know about God, the more you know about yourself.

the history of revelation, or as titles relating to different functions. Sabellius believed in a Trinity of revelation. The orthodox view is one of an *ontological* Trinity—God is a Trinity in the very nature of His being.

Are you searching for meaning and purpose in life? Are you trying to “find yourself?” The Bible says God created us in His image, and He had a plan for your life before you were even born.⁵ That means no matter how dysfunctional your family was, you were no accident. God loves you, and He has a specific purpose for your life. The better you know Him, the better you will know yourself.

2. The more you know about yourself, the more thankful you will be for the love, grace, and mercy of God.

Knowing God not only assures me of His plan and purpose for my life, it also shows me my own faults and sinfulness. The more I know about God, the more holy and righteous I recognize Him to be. The more holy and righteous I recognize Him to be, the more sinful and wicked I realize I am. The more sinful and wicked I realize I am, the more thankful I am for God’s love, grace, and mercy.

3. The more thankful you are for the love, grace, and mercy of God, the deeper you will want to grow in your relationship with God.

The Apostle Paul wrote, ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!...For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:33-36).

⁵ Genesis 1:26-27; Jeremiah 1:5

When you realize how much God loves you, and when you realize the depth of His grace and mercy in your life, your desire will be to serve Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. Your desire will be to grow in your relationship with Him, and that changes every aspect of your life.

4. A deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit is the key to a more intimate relationship with God.

This is the big answer to the big question, “So what?” Jesus promised after His departure that a “Counselor”⁶ would come, and that this Counselor would give you all you needed to obtain victory in this life, as well as teach you all you need to know about God. Jesus said, “When He comes He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...when He...comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:8, 12). If you want to grow in your relationship with God, you must open yourself up and allow the Holy Spirit to have complete control of your life.

Gordon Brownville’s, *Symbols of the Holy Spirit*, tells about the great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, the first to discover the magnetic meridian of the North Pole and to discover the South Pole. On one of his trips, Amundsen took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird’s cage and set it free. Imagine the delight of Amundsen’s wife, back in Norway, when she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. No doubt she exclaimed, “He’s alive! My husband is still alive!”

⁶ The KJV translates this word “Comforter.” Literally it means “one who comes along beside.”

So it was when Jesus ascended. He was gone, but the disciples clung to His promise to send the Holy Spirit. What joy, then, when the dovelike Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. The disciples had with them the continual reminder that Jesus was alive and victorious at the right hand of the Father. This continues to be the Spirit's message.

If you desire to take your relationship with Jesus to the next level it will require a deeper commitment to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If you desire to know more about God it will require a commitment to know more about the Holy Spirit. The secret to peace and contentment in this life is the Holy Spirit. The key to overcoming sin and living a victorious Christian life is the Holy Spirit. The power to continue is the Holy Spirit. Discovering and using your spiritual gift is found in your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Several years ago power began to flicker after a major power outage struck simultaneously across dozens of cities in the eastern United States and Canada. Cities affected included New York, Cleveland, Detroit, and Toronto. The reason for the outage was unclear, but something happened, disrupting the source. People were stuck on elevators, subways, and even a rollercoaster. Everything seemed to shut down at once. The power supply was gone. People walked around in darkness.

The "power supply" of the Christian life is the Holy Spirit. He convicts of sins, leads in truth, and gives confidence to live a successful Christian life. Sadly, many

Christians are experiencing a spiritual “blackout” because they have been knocked off line, and are trying to live without any real power. Just as anyone gropes around in darkness after a blackout, anyone who dims the power of the Holy Spirit in his life has no sure sense of spiritual direction. Do you need to connect, or re-connect to the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?