

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

LESSON 18

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE PERSON

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Cathedral in the town of New Iberia, Louisiana has a diagram on the ceiling. It is a wheel with a hub and three spokes. The hub says "God". The three spokes each have the word "is" on them. The spokes connect to three words on the wheel: "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit". In between those words are 3 divisions, each of which it says "is not". If you read from the hub through the spokes to the wheel, it says: "God is Father, God is Son, God is Holy Spirit". If you follow the wheel, it says: "Father is not Son is not Holy Spirit is not Father". It is a graphic and powerful way of saying that God is composed of three distinct persons, each of which is dependent upon the other in a mysterious bond we call the Trinity. A concept, but not a term, found throughout scripture. The name came from Tertullian in the early third century. The truth is:

1. God is three Persons.
2. Each Person is fully God.
3. There is one God.

Denial of each one of these statements has resulted in theological and doctrinal error throughout history.

I. The Holy Spirit: Person, Not Thing

Since a study of the Holy Spirit concerns God and His truth, false teaching has developed to deny or distort orthodox doctrine. This should come as no surprise since II Corinthians 11:14 instructs us that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light". That he should attack this prime doctrine of Christianity is certainly in keeping with his strategy of destroying God's saving truth.

The Holy Spirit is often incorrectly referred to as an "it" or a "thing", but the Spirit shares personhood with the Father and The Son. Since man is made in God's image, He must, like man, possess intellect, emotion, and will, the defining attributes of a human being.

II Corinthians 2:10 states that "the Spirit searches all things." In other words, He examines, investigates, and reveals. Those are the marks of an intelligence and of possessing an intellect.

The Spirit "understands the mind of God" (Rom. 8:27, Eph 1:17), thus He can "translate" or reveal God's thoughts to us. Since it takes a mind to know a mind, the Spirit has, like human beings, a mind.

The Holy Spirit also has an emotional side to His being. He can be grieved and Eph. 4:30 strongly cautions us not to evoke this response in Him.

Spiritual gifts are distributed according to men as the Spirit so wills and ordains. Like man, therefore, the spirit has a will. When Paul wanted to take the Gospel to Asia, the Spirit strongly forbade this and in a vision prompted the Apostle to turn West to Macedonia (Acts 16).

II. Major Errors Concerning The Holy Spirit

From its' very inception, Christianity was plagued with attempts to twist and nullify the truth contained in God's revealed word. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit fell victim to Satanic attack early in the 3rd century.

1. Modalism – This heresy was first introduced in Rome in the early 3rd century by Sabellius and is often called “Sabellianism”. Simply put, it is the teaching that God is one person who appears to us in three different forms or “modes”. According to this distortion, God appeared as “Father” in the Old Testament, “Son” in the Gospels, and “Spirit” after Pentecost. Modern Unitarianism finds its roots in this heresy.
2. Arianism – This was the first major heretical controversy to plague the early church. It came through Arius, a bishop of Alexandria. He taught that God the Son, was at a certain point in time, created by God the Father, and that before that neither the Son nor the Spirit existed, only the Father. Arius was condemned at the council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The Nicene Creed asserts that Christ was “begotten not made” and that He was of the same nature (homoousias) as the Father, not a similar nature (homoiousias).
3. Subordinationism – The subtleties of this position assert that, contrary to Arianism, Jesus was eternally co-existent with God, but not equal.
4. Adoptionism – This position reduces Jesus to the status of a mere mortal who was adopted by God at His baptism. Like Arianism, it denies the deity of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) added a statement to the Nicene Creed to affirm the deity of the Holy Spirit.
“...and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets.”
To this statement, the Synod of Toledo in 598 A.D. added: “proceeds from the Father and and the Son”. It referred to the eternal, not temporal, relationship of the Trinity and ultimately split the Western (Roman Catholic) church from the Eastern (Orthodox) church in 1054 A.D.
5. Tri-theism: A logical progression in this line of thinking would be this false teaching which asserts that there is not just one God, but three, and each person is fully God. Thus, there are no differences in deity, attributes, or essential nature between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God and has all the attributes of God. The only distinctive between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to the rest of the creation.

III. The Work Of The Holy Spirit

As the Father functions as Creator and sustainer of the Universe and the Son functions as the Redeemer and Advocate of fallen mankind, so too does the Holy Spirit have His particular functions and tasks:

1. The Spirit Teaches – Jesus was a teacher and He said He would send “another Helper” to us. (John 14:16) The Holy Spirit confirms and illuminates Christ's teachings.
2. The Spirit Testifies – In John 15:26 Jesus explicitly states that “the Holy Spirit will testify about Me”. This is the chief task of the Spirit. No one can declare that Jesus is the Son of God “but by the Spirit.”

3. The Spirit Guides – The opportunities for error are vast and Jesus was quick to remind us that the Spirit would “guide us into all truth.” (John 16:13)
4. The Spirit Convicts – One of the chief responsibilities is conviction. He works on our hearts and consciences and convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The conviction of sin calls for repentance. The Spirit reveals to people God’s righteousness because Jesus was going back to His Father and would no longer be present to fulfill that function. He also would demonstrate God’s judgment on Satan.
5. The Spirit Regenerates - The work of regeneration is a concept espoused by the Old and New Testaments. (Ezek. 36:25-27, John 5:21, Titus 3:5). The “Second Birth” Jesus discussed with Nicodemus is accomplished only in the power of the Spirit.
6. The Spirit Intercedes – (Romans 8:26) The Fall has so ruined our relationship with God that the Spirit has to intercede with God on our behalf. In this role He acts as a Divine Translator.
7. The Spirit Commands - The Spirit often acts decisively to make God’s will known. For instance, He spoke emphatically to the church in Antioch and indicated that Paul and Silas were to be “set apart...for the work which I have called them.” He also, in Acts 8:29, commanded Phillip with respect to the Ethiopian eunuch to “go up and join this chariot”.

IV. Our Relationship To The Spirit Confirms His Personality

As in human relationships, our dealings with the Holy Spirit reveal qualities and abilities that define and delineate His personality.

1. The Spirit Can Be Grieved – (Eph. 4:30, Isa. 63:10) Isaiah spoke of how Israel grieved the Spirit of God after He had done so much to save them and Paul echoes a strong admonition to refrain from doing so in his letter to the church at Ephesus.
2. The Spirit Can Be Blasphemed – (Matt. 12:32, Mark 3:29-30) The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit actually has two components: a) it comes out of the context of the Pharisees attributing the works of Christ to Satan and since it is the Holy Spirit that authenticates the work of Jesus as being wrought in God, it totally discounts the nature of the Holy Spirit, and b) the rejection of Jesus also negates the work of the Spirit in conviction of sin and reception of grace. The sin against the Holy Spirit was termed “unforgivable” by Jesus (Mark 3:29).
3. The Spirit Can Be Resisted – In Stephen’s speech against the unbelieving Jews who ultimately stoned him, he accused them of “always resisting the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7).
4. The Spirit Can Be Lied To – This was dramatically illustrated in the story of Annanias and Sapphira in Acts 5. It was a deadly lesson to learn.
5. The Spirit Can Be Obeyed – (Acts 10) Although Peter was initially resistant to the vision God gave him in Joppa, he ultimately obeyed resulting in God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in His plan to redeem mankind.

V. Divine Attributes of The Spirit

Since God and the Spirit are one, what applies to one, applies to the other. The following characteristics can readily be applied to the spirit: life (Rom. 8:2), omniscience (I Cor. 2:10), omnipotence (Gen 1:2), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), eternity (Heb. 9:14), holiness (Matt. 12:32), love (Gal. 5:22), and truth (John 14:17).

VI. Divine Works Of The Spirit

While the attributes of the Spirit define His nature and character, the works of the Spirit show his power and effectiveness. The works are unique to the Holy Spirit and show his power and activity: creation (Gen. 1:2), generating Christ (the virgin birth) (Matt. 1:2), inspiration of scripture (2 Peter 1:21), regeneration (Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:23; John 3:6), intercession (Rom. 8:26), sanctification (II Thess. 2:13), and helping the saints (John 14:16).

VII. Description And Representation Of The Holy Spirit

Besides the scriptures that describe the nature, attributes, work, etc. of the Holy Spirit there are a number of passages that offer representation or symbols of the Holy Spirit. These are more poetic in nature, but they offer further insight into a better comprehension of the Holy Spirit of God.

Clothing – Luke 24:29

Dove – John 1:32

Pledge – II Cor. 1:22, Eph.1:14

Fire – Acts 2:3

Oil – Zech. 4:1-14, I Sam. 10:6,10

Seal – II Cor. 1:22

Water – John 7:37-39

Wind – John 3:8, I Cor. 12:11

VIII. The Spirit In Relation To Christ

Isaiah prophesied concerning the coming Messiah and declared that the Spirit would rest upon Him and equip Him for His ministry. There are four specific moments in the life of Jesus that the Spirit played a vital and pivotal role.

1. The Virgin Birth – In the announcement to both Mary and Joseph, Jesus was declared to be have been conceived of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 1:20, Luke 2:35)
2. Christ's Life And Ministry – Luke 4:18 indicates He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. Following that, Mark 1:2 describes how the Holy Spirit “impelled Him into the wilderness to be tempted.”
3. Christ's Death – The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that Christ “through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God.”
4. The Resurrection of Christ – The Holy Spirit was the agent of resuscitation involved in the Resurrection as Rom 8:11 describes Him as “the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead.”

IX. Filling Of The Spirit

Of the procedures involving the Holy Spirit, i.e. regeneration, baptism, indwelling, sealing, and filling, only the filling of the Spirit is conditional. The rest are not. They are a part of trusting Christ as Lord and Savior. Eph. 5:18 says to be filled with the Spirit and not get drunk with wine. It is being filled with the Spirit that provides control. To be carnal is to operate in the power of the flesh. To be spiritual is to operate in the power of the Spirit. Filling is necessary for maturity.

Three Factors of Being Spirit-filled

1. It is a command.
2. It is conditional.
3. It is repeated.

The topic of the filling of the Spirit will be discussed in more detail in our next lesson.

Filling Results In The Fruit Of The Spirit

The Spirit bestows nine gifts (I Cor. 12:8-10) and nine graces (Gal. 5:22-23). The gifts are for power, service, and ministry. Spiritual gifts will be studied in a later lesson. The graces are for Christian character and Christian living. Life lived in the care and control of the Holy Spirit overflows into worship, adoration and praise and makes us want to express the kind of love and devotion of that great Trinitarian Hymn:

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee!
Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”

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