

THE
Holy
SPIRIT

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16–18).

The question is not “What is the Holy Spirit? Rather, the question is “Who is the Holy Spirit?” This is the question because the Holy Spirit is a being, an individual with personality. He is more than a force or a power; He is a living heavenly person.

HE IS A “SPIRIT”

The Hebrew word *ruach* is translated “spirit,” “wind,” and “breath,” as well as “the Spirit of God” in the Old Testament. Its Greek equivalent, *pneuma*, is used for “spirit” in the New Testament, whether in reference to the human spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11; see also Proverbs 20:27) or divine beings, such as God (John 4:24) and angels (Hebrews 1:13, 14). At times the word “spirit” may refer to a heavenly being, such as the spirit that is said to have stood before God and spoken to Him (1 Kings 22:21). “The Hebrew and Greek words that are translated ‘spirit’ are *ruach* and *pneuma*, both meaning literally ‘wind, breath.’ Both came to be used for the unseen reality of living beings, especially God and man.”¹

In all cases in the New Testament *pneuma* is translated “spirit”—except in John 3:8, where it appears as “wind” in most translations. Even there, “Spirit” may be preferred. James Oliver Buswell Jr. stated concerning this verse, “In at least one passage (John 3:8) the interpretation is doubtful, but this verse would much better be translated, ‘The Spirit breathes where he chooses. . . .’”²

Guy N. Woods wrote,

The word *pneuma* (Spirit) occurs several hundred times in the Greek New Testament. In no other instance do the standard translations render it wind. It occurs twice in this passage and is rendered ‘wind’ in the first clause and ‘Spirit’ in the last. It would be no more incorrect to render the final clause, ‘so is everyone that is born of the wind,’ as it is to translate the first clause, ‘The wind bloweth. . . .’”³

¹Emmet Russell, “Holy Spirit,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), 447.

²James Oliver Buswell Jr., “Spirit,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), 961.

³Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1984), 63.

A spirit may be the inner spark of God's nature which He places within us (Zechariah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 12:7) and which departs from the body at death (Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26). It may be an attitude (Romans 8:15; 1 Corinthians 4:21; Galatians 6:1) or a non-physical being (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Jesus indicated the non-physical nature of a spirit: "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). A spirit, such as God (John 4:24), cannot be seen with the human eye (1 Timothy 6:16) because spirits exist in a spiritual dimension, a non-physical dimension (2 Corinthians 4:18). Good spirits are God's angels (Hebrews 1:13, 14), and evil spirits, also known as demons (Mark 5:2, 15), are the devil's angels (Matthew 25:41).

HE IS A "PERSON"

All information available in the Bible points to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a divine person. He has the same personal traits as do the Father and the Son.

Attributes of a Person

The attributes of the Holy Spirit indicate that He is a living person, an individual, instead of just a force:

1. *Judgment*: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:28a).
2. *Mind*: "And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is" (Romans 8:27a).
3. *Will*: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11). According to Hebrews 2:4, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given according to the will of God.
4. *Knowledge*: "Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11b).
5. *Emotions* (love, grief, joy): "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30); "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30); "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the

Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

The fact that the Holy Spirit possesses these traits reveals that He is a person.

Activities of a Person

The Holy Spirit acts as a person and not merely a force. He can do the following:

1. *Teach and remind*: "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 said to you" (John 14:26).
2. *Bear witness*: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me" (John 15:26).
3. *Guide into truth*: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13a).
4. *Speak*: "For He will not speak on His own initiative" (John 16:13b; see also Acts 8:29; 11:12; 1 Timothy 4:1).
5. *Hear*: "But whatever He hears, He will speak" (John 16:13c).
6. *Disclose*: "And He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13d).
7. *Forbid*: "And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6).
8. *Give life*: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you" (Romans 8:11b).
9. *Reveal*: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:10a; see also Ephesians 3:3-5).
10. *Search*: "For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10b).
11. *Promise*: "In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14; see Acts 2:33).
12. *Fellowship*: "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; see also Philippians 2:1).
13. *Intercede*: "... but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ... He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27).

14. *Indicate and predict*: “. . . the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Peter 1:11).

15. *Invite*: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (Revelation 22:17a).

16. *Lead*: “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1); “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

A person can engage in each of these activities, while a mere force cannot. Thus the Holy Spirit should be seen as a person.

He Can Be Mistreated

The words used to describe the slights and injuries done to the Holy Spirit are usually terms associated with the mistreatment of a person

instead of wrongs committed against a non-living power or force. He can be mistreated in these ways:

1. *Blasphemed*: “. . . but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. . . whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31, 32).

2. *Lied to*: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, . . .?’” (Acts 5:3a).

3. *Resisted*: “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51a).

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

5. *Insulted or despised*: “. . . and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29).

BLASPHEMING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Of all the sins against the Holy Spirit, the one most discussed is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. A wide range of explanations have been given concerning what Jesus meant when He spoke about blasphemy of the Spirit. Three of the Four Gospels mention this offense (Matthew 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:9, 10).

Some have wrongly taught that other Bible passages refer to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 6:4–6 and 1 John 5:16, for example, are not referring to one specific sin, or the writers would have named that sin. Instead, these verses are referring to sin in general. Jesus, on the other hand, was speaking of a specific sin, the sin of speaking evil against the Holy Spirit.

The context in Matthew indicates that an intent to hurt the reputation of the Holy Spirit in the eyes of others is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were speaking against Jesus in order to convince others that His works were done through the power of Satan (Matthew 12:24). They had gone beyond rejecting Jesus and His teaching; they were blaspheming. Jesus indicated that speaking against Him in this way could be forgiven (Matthew 12:32).

Paul—when he was known as Saul—worked against Jesus by persecuting Christians, even to the point of blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:13–16). He is an example of one who was forgiven for blaspheming against Jesus.

In contrast, Jesus taught that those who spoke against the Holy Spirit with evil intent could not be forgiven. Those who would do this would have to understand more than just the basics of Christianity. They would have to understand some of the finer points, including the work of the Holy Spirit. In speaking against Him, they would not only reject His activities but would also seek to lead others to turn from Him by attributing His work to Satan. Through their efforts they would bring damnation to themselves and could cause those who accepted their teaching to be lost.

Blaspheming is more than rejecting the word of the Holy Spirit. It is speaking against the Holy Spirit so as to discredit His work and persuade others that His work is coming from an evil source. No one would do this lightly. A malicious intent would have to be in the heart of the one who would act in this manner. Anyone who devotes himself to this behavior cannot be forgiven in this age or in the age to come; he is committing an eternal sin (Mark 3:29).

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit includes three offenses: (1) having a malicious attitude toward the Holy Spirit, (2) speaking evil about Him to others, and (3) seeking to influence others to reject His work and to believe that it comes from an evil source.

6. *Quenched*: “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The statements made concerning how the Holy Spirit can be mistreated indicate that He is a person. Ill treatment of powers or forces are usually not described in the above manner, except in a poetic or figurative context. The contexts of these verses do not indicate that the language is figurative.

He Has a Separate Existence

Another indication that the Holy Spirit is a person is that He is not only mentioned along with the Father and the Son as having their nature and character, but He also has His own distinct and separate existence.

He is mentioned as descending on Jesus when He was baptized (John 1:33). When the Son came out of the water of baptism, the Spirit descended on Jesus and the Father spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16, 17; Luke 3:21, 22). The Father remained in heaven; the Son remained on earth; and the Spirit came to dwell with Jesus.

A person can speak evil against Jesus and be forgiven—but if he speaks against the Holy Spirit, he cannot be forgiven (Matthew 12:32). How can one speak against Jesus and not against the Holy Spirit if they are the same person? In giving this teaching, Jesus must have realized their separateness.

Jesus was said to be full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), just as others were said to be full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24). Surely, all will agree that the people who were full of the Holy Spirit in these cases in Acts were not the same person as the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit also must be recognized as distinctly separate Beings.

Some believe that Jesus is the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit was in the world before Jesus was born to Mary. The Spirit was in John “while yet in his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). This could have been as much as six months before Mary conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26, 35).

John wrote that the Holy Spirit was not yet given (John 7:39) for Jesus was not glorified. This was stated while Jesus was already on earth with the apostles. The Holy Spirit must be someone other than Jesus if the Holy Spirit had not yet been given.

Jesus stated that He would send the apostles “another Helper,” according to John 14:16, the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). How could Jesus send them “another” Helper if He was the Helper? Likewise, how could the Holy Spirit be “another” Helper if He and Jesus are the same?

The Greek word *allon*, translated “other,” expresses the idea that the Holy Spirit is not Jesus, but another Person like Him. A. T. Robertson wrote,

Another Comforter (allon parakleton). Another of like kind (*allon*, not *heteron*) besides Jesus who becomes our Paraclete, Helper, Advocate, with the Father (1 John 2:1, cf. Romans 8:26f.).⁴

Marvin R. Vincent wrote in reference to *allon* that it expresses “numerical distinction.”⁵ He later wrote, “Note also that the word another is *allon*, and not *eteron*, which means different. The advocate who is to be sent is not different from Christ, but another similar to Himself.”⁶

William Hendriksen wrote, “The word another indicates one like myself, who will take my place, do my work. Hence, if Jesus is a person, the Holy Spirit must also be a person.”⁷ The Holy Spirit is not Jesus. He is another Helper (Comforter) who is not different in nature from Jesus, but who is like Him.

Jesus said He would not send the Spirit until after He had gone away (John 16:7). He also said that the Spirit would not speak on His own initiative, but would speak what He heard from Jesus (John 16:14). The information given in the New Testament about Jesus and the Holy Spirit indicates that they are two independent, separate heavenly Persons.

HE IS DIVINE

The Holy Spirit is mentioned along with the Father and the Son, as their equal, having the same status. People are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The Spirit, God (“the Father”;

⁴Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 252.

⁵Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 47.

⁶*Ibid.*, 244.

⁷William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), 275.

1 Corinthians 8:6), and the Lord (“Jesus”; 1 Corinthians 8:6) are the ones who administer the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4–6) which are said to be given according to the will of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11). Paul mentioned the Three together, as having the same status, in 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.”⁸

The evidence in the New Testament seems overwhelming that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct, individual heavenly Beings of like nature. They are joined together as one in their relationship with each other and in their service to mankind.

Qualities possessed only by Deity are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Note five attributes which He shares with the Father and the Son:

1. *Eternality*: The following are Bible statements concerning the eternal nature of (1) the Holy Spirit—“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14); (2) the Father—“Thy throne is established from of old; Thou art from everlasting” (Psalm 93:2); and (3) Jesus—“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Hebrews 13:8); “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Peter 1:11).

2. *Omniscience*: This trait is spoken of in Bible passages concerning (1) the Holy Spirit—“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10); (2) the Father—“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13); and (3) Jesus—“But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24, 25).

3. *Omnipotence*: Several Bible passages men-

⁸See also Matthew 3:16, 17; John 3:34; 14:26; 15:26; 16:15; Romans 14:17, 18; 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18, 20–22; 4:4–6; 5:18–20; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20, 21.

tion this attribute in relation to (1) the Holy Spirit—“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35b); “And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14a); “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a); (2) God—“For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37); and (3) Jesus—“... ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’” (Matthew 28:18).

4. *Omnipresence*: This characteristic is applied to (1) the Holy Spirit—“Where can I go from Thy Spirit?” (Psalm 139:7a); (2) the Father—“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee” (1 Kings 8:27a); “‘Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?’ declares the Lord. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’...” (Jeremiah 23:24); and (3) Jesus—“I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b).

5. *Creative Power*: These Bible passages portray each member of the Godhead as Creator: (1) The Holy Spirit—“... the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2)⁹; (2) the Father—“It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens” (Jeremiah 51:15); and (3) the Son—“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is described in terms that can apply only to Deity. From these terms we can draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit shares the divine nature with the Father and the Son and is one with the Father and the Son, but that He is a distinct personality. He is an important, central person of the Bible. ■

⁹Other passages are used by some to show that the Holy Spirit helped in the Creation; however, these seem to be lacking as solid evidence. Most translations of Job 26:13 do not contain a statement that could apply to creation. The same is true of translations of Job 27:3; Isaiah 40:12, 13; Psalm 33:6, passages sometimes used as proof that the Spirit helped with creation. Psalm 104:30 may only refer poetically to renewal and not to the original creation.