

Week 9

God the Holy Spirit: His Person

Key Verse

John 15:26 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 testify about Me.

+ Introduction

Most conversations about the Holy Spirit focus on what He does and leave a lot of questions about who He is. He is a divine person, co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. Many Christians know Him without realizing it, and we need Scripture to help us speak about Him intelligently. This lesson will outline the Bible's revelation of God, the Holy Spirit.

+ The Holy Spirit is Divine

The first words of Scripture reveal the Holy Spirit in a shadowy way:

GENESIS 1:1-2 *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*

The term "Spirit of God" literally means the "wind" or "breath" of God. Scripture introduces this "Spirit of God" in the same way it introduces God: it assumes Him. The "heavens and the earth" were created, but the Spirit of God simply is. Uncreated. Essential. Divine.¹

The Holy Spirit makes other appearances in the Old Testament. He endows people with godly wisdom and skill (Genesis 41:38-39; Exodus 28:3). He empowers leaders to rescue and rule God's people (Judges 3:10-11; Judges 6:34; Judges 11:29-33; 1 Samuel 16:13-14; Isaiah 63:7-14). He inspires prophets to announce and write God's words (2 Samuel 23:1-2; Ezekiel 2:2; Micah 3:8).

All of these Holy Spirit “cameos” highlight God’s plan to redeem humanity, judge sin, and restore creation; but, they do not necessarily tell us **Who** the Holy Spirit is.

The New Testament is where we see a fuller revelation of the Holy Spirit. It is there that God fulfills His promises to redeem, judge, and restore creation through Jesus Christ. With the Son of God’s coming, we also get to see the full divinity of the Spirit of God in His divine attributes, associations, and acts.

First, Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit has **divine attributes**. He exists everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10). He knows everything (Isaiah 40:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11). He can do impossible things (Luke 1:35-37). And He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14) – just like God.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is part of a **divine association**. He is alongside God the Father and God the Son in several passages, including the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:22), Jesus’ “Great Commission” to His disciples (Matthew 28:19), the Apostle Paul’s description of the Christian life (Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22), Paul’s call for church unity (Ephesians 4:4-5), Paul’s blessing on the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 13:14), and the Apostle Peter’s summary of salvation (1 Peter 1:2). Clearly, the Holy Spirit is a member of the most divine association in existence.

Finally, the Holy Spirit does **divine acts**. As we saw above, He creates and sustains life (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:27-30). He drives out demons (Matthew 12:28). He inspired the words of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). He gives spiritual life to new believers (i.e., regeneration; John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5). Someday He will give physical life to the dead bodies of those same believers (i.e., resurrection; Romans 8:11).

The Holy Spirit’s divine footprint was so evident to early Christians that an entire book of Scripture was given to catalog His activity: Acts of the Apostles (often referred to as Acts of the Holy Spirit). While there are several passages in Acts affirming the Holy Spirit’s divinity (we looked at Acts 5:3-4 in a previous lesson), the whole book is a testimony to the deity of its main character: the Holy Spirit.

✦ The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person

Because He is Spirit, the Holy Spirit is unseen. But being invisible does not make Him impersonal. In fact, Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person, bearing personal characteristics, participating in personal activities, and engaging in personal relationships.

He has **personal characteristics** like intelligence (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), a will (1 Corinthians 12:11), and emotions (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30).

He does **personal activities** like speaking (Matthew 10:20; John 16:13; Acts 21:11; Acts 28:25; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29), praying (Romans 8:26); teaching (Luke 12:12; John 14:26); bearing witness (John 15:26; Romans 8:6; Hebrews 10:15), and guiding (John 16:13).

Most importantly, He has personal relationships that distinguish Him from other persons. Earlier, we saw that the Holy Spirit exists in divine association with God the Father and God the Son.

Jesus reveals some of the defining marks of this relationship in John chapters 14–16, which most Christians believe is the key Biblical passage about the Holy Spirit: ²

JOHN 14:16-17 *"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..."*

JOHN 15:26 *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 testify about Me...*

JOHN 16:13-14 *When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me..."*

The "Helper" or Spirit of truth" Jesus describes is the Holy Spirit. Notice all the relational language Jesus uses to describe Him. He is *sent* by Jesus *from* the Father. He *proceeds from* the Father. He *testifies about* Jesus to His disciples and will *be with* them forever. Notice also how Jesus describes Him as another *Helper*. This makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is not a different version of Jesus, but He is a distinct divine person sent to be with the disciples.

So, Scripture clearly shows that the Holy Spirit is a divine **person**, existing in an eternal, co-equal relationship with God the Father and God the Son. But what about His relationships with human beings?

✦ The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person Living Within Every Christian

Going back to Jesus' words in John's Gospel, we see the most important thing about the Holy Spirit for every believer in Jesus Christ:

JOHN 14:16 *"I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."* (emphasis added)

Jesus promises the **Holy Spirit's ongoing presence** in the lives of Christians. But how could such a miracle happen? How could He – a divine person – come to live with sinful human beings forever?

This question highlights the power of what Jesus Christ accomplished through His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. Although this lesson is about God the Spirit, it is impossible to think of any person in the Trinity in isolation, and we can never ignore God the Son (Hebrews 12:2). In fact, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would *"testify about"* Him and *"glorify"* Him, so any consideration of the Holy Spirit must magnify the person and work of Jesus Christ (John 15:26; 16:14). We need to consider Jesus for a moment to understand better who the Holy Spirit is.

You have probably heard that Jesus is our Savior who takes away people's sins (John 1:29). You may even know Jesus was crucified to pay the penalty of your sin. But have you ever thought

about for what purpose? Why is God so concerned with removing sins? People typically answer this question in one of three ways:

- a. **To meet our needs:** "God removes sin so we can feel guilt-free, have a clean slate, and live a better life." There is truth to this statement, but it is not the full Gospel. Many people have found ways to stop feeling guilty or live a good life without Jesus.
- b. **To meet God's needs.** "God removes sin so we can serve Him and go to Heaven someday." Again, there is truth here, but not the full Gospel truth. God is self-existent, so He has zero needs. Heaven is equally wonderful with or without people like us.
- c. **We need to meet God.** "God removes sin so we can encounter Him continually and live in relationship with Him." This is a biblical understanding of the Gospel. When Jesus takes away sins, He is doing exactly what is needed for people to encounter God, glorify Him, and enjoy Him in a life-giving relationship.

This is all to say that Jesus' came in human flesh, lived, died, and rose again **so that** people like us could know God's ongoing presence: the Holy Spirit. Let's consider three aspects of this wonderful truth: His promise, His personality, and His permanence.

Beginning with Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel, God **promised** to send His Spirit to dwell within His people as the sign of a New Covenant between Him and creation (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32). According to the Apostle Paul, it is possible that the patriarch Abraham received this promise. (Galatians 3:14).

The anticipation of this promise heightens with the coming of Jesus. As we have seen above, Jesus announced this promise in John 14:16. He would go on to illustrate the promise after His resurrection when He "breathed" on His disciples (an allusion to Genesis 1:2) saying, "*Receive the Holy Spirit*" (John 20:22). Later, Jesus fulfilled the promise after His ascension when a "rushing wind" came on the apostles (another scriptural allusion to Genesis 1:2), and every believer was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-4). At long last, God was present with His people through the Holy Spirit.

Since then, whenever a person trusts in Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior, it is because the Holy Spirit has moved in to take up residence in their life.³ He convicts people of their sin (John 16:8-11), destroys any barriers to faith (2 Corinthians 10:4-5), and brings them to life spiritually (Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:4). This "new birth" is what Jesus spoke of when He said:

JOHN 3:7-8 *"...You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

Every person who places saving faith in Jesus Christ has been "*born of the Spirit.*" They are living evidence that God kept His promise to send His Holy Spirit. Conversely, people who have not placed faith in Jesus do not have the Holy Spirit in their life.

Next, consider the **personality** of the Holy Spirit. He is just like Jesus Christ. Jesus calls Him “another Helper” in John 14:16, implying that Jesus Himself is the first “Helper.” When Paul wrote that “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17), he said that the Holy Spirit is exactly like Jesus Christ in character. Even in His crucifixion, Jesus offered Himself “*through the eternal Spirit... without blemish to God*” (Hebrews 9:14). Although much can be said about the character or personality of Jesus based on the Gospels, the words of Isaiah offer a wonderful summary of what Jesus and the Holy Spirit are like:

ISAIAH 11:2

*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

Because the Holy Spirit has the personality of Christ, Christians, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, become more Christ-like over time. So, Paul could say “*And we all...are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18).⁴

Finally, consider the **permanence** of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes and goes in the lives of people like Samson, Saul (1 Samuel 16:14), and even believers like David (Psalm 51:11). But in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit “seals” believers in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30). Look again at the words of Jesus in John:

JOHN 14:16 “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.*” (emphasis added)

For many Christians the reality of the Holy Spirit’s “forever” residence is a source of ongoing joy and wonder. He reminds Christians that they belong to God (Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24; Galatians 4:6), that Jesus will never cast them out (John 6:37) and that God will never let them go (John 10:29). He makes Christians aware of sins they must leave behind (John 16:8-11). Moreover, He points toward the glorious eternal future when God’s ongoing presence will be unfathomably richer than it is now (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). For this reason, some Christians speak of the Holy Spirit as a “down payment” on eternity.

+ Conclusion

Sometimes it is easier to think of the Holy Spirit as an “it.” However, Scripture has clearly indicated that the Holy Spirit is not an “it,” nor is it neutral. The Holy Spirit is an equal and vital role of the Trinity with very specific responsibilities. The role is often put on a back burner in some denominations and put on center stage in other denominations. The goal is to bring focus to the Holy Spirit as laid out in Scripture, being part of the fullness of the Triune God.

The beauty and mystery of the Holy Spirit are that He indwells every believer. We have allowed the Bible to show us who the Holy Spirit is and where He lives. Later this year, we will take a closer look at the ways Christians interact with the Holy Spirit living inside them. The Holy Spirit is purposefully working in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has gifted you accordingly to be part of the bigger picture of the church. The Holy Spirit continues to fulfill the promise Jesus made so long ago.

+ Sources

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¹Despite almost 1,800 years of agreement among Christian commentators, some recent liberal scholars and commentators challenge the idea that Genesis 1:2 refers to the Holy Spirit (Brevard Childs, Gerhard von Rad). For a convincing grammatical and Biblical theological defense of the classic position, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996, pp. 18–21.

²Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, New York: HarperOne, 1992, p. 521. See also, J.I. Packer, "The Holy Spirit," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair Ferguson et. al, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, pp. 317–318.

³The theological term for this "new birth" is *regeneration*. All Bible believing Christians understand regeneration to be a necessary work of the Holy Spirit, but significant disagreement exists between those who connect regeneration with water baptism (i.e., Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Churches of Christ), and those who connect regeneration with conversion (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterian and Reformed churches). Titus 3:5 is a decisive text: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." H. Burkhardt, "Regeneration," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair Ferguson et. al, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, p. 574.

⁴The theological term for this "transformation" is called *sanctification*. Scripture talks about sanctification in two different ways: "definitive sanctification," which is an instantaneous verdict of holiness – based on union with Christ – at the moment of salvation (Acts 20:32; Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:32); and "progressive sanctification," which is a subsequent series of life-changes leading toward holiness (Romans 8:11; Romans 15:16; 1 Peter 1:15). Both kinds of sanctification are connected to the Holy Spirit.