

Basics of the Christian Faith
Lesson 4
Who is the Holy Spirit?

There are several reasons why the study of the Holy Spirit is of special significance for us. One is that the Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer. The Holy Spirit is the one who is active within the lives of the believers; he lives within us. The Holy Spirit is the particular person of the Trinity through whom the entire Godhead works in us.

Another reason for the importance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that our current culture stresses the experiential, and it is primarily through him that we experience God. It is through the Holy Spirit's work that we feel God's presence within and the Christian life is given a special tangibility.

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is divine (define deity).

The problem: It is probably well said that the deity of the Father is simply assumed in Scripture. The deity of the Son is affirmed and argued. The deity of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture.

1. There are various references to the Holy Spirit that are interchangeable with God.

Acts 5:3,4 – “How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God.”

1 Cor. 3:16,16 – Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you? In anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Cor. 6:19-20 – Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you've received from God... Therefore honor God with your body.

By equating the phrase “God's temple” with the phrase “a temple of the Holy Spirit,” Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God.

2. The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of qualities of God.

Omniscience (knows everything)

1 Cor. 2:10-11 – The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God... no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

John 16:13 – When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...

Power

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me...by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Eternality (he exists forever)

Hebrews 9:14 – He is “the eternal Spirit” through whom Jesus offered himself up. Only God is eternal (Heb. 1:10-12), all creatures being temporary. The Holy Spirit must be God.

3. The Holy Spirit performs certain works that are commonly attributed to God.

Creation (both at creation and in continuing to be involved in creation)

Gen. 1:2 – Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Psalms 104:30 – When you send your Spirit, they are created (all the parts of creation previously mentioned) and you renew the face of the earth.

4. The Holy Spirit is active in creating and preserving the Scriptures

2 Tim. 3:16 – All scripture is inspired by God [literally God-breathed] and useful for teaching, rebuking, and correcting and training in righteousness...

John 14:26 – the Spirit “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

1 Peter 1:21 – For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a person

The Spirit is a glorifying agent

John 16:14 – Jesus says that the Spirit “will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Holy Spirit's personality seems human

Acts 15:28 - “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

He can be lied to

Acts 5:3,4

He can be grieved

Eph. 4:30 – And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were seal for the day of redemption.

He can be quenched

1 Thess. 5:19 – “Do not put out the Spirit's fire” (or do not quench the Spirit).

What does this mean about the nature of the Holy Spirit?

1. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a vague force. He is someone with whom we can have a personal relationship, someone to whom we can and should pray.
2. Since he is divine, he is to be given the same honor and respect that we give to the Father and Son. It is appropriate to worship the Holy Spirit. He is not inferior, but subordinate.
3. God is not far off. In the Holy Spirit, the Triune God comes so close as to actually enter into each believer.

What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

The Beginning of the Christian Life

In Jesus' teaching we find a strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit initiating people into the Christian life. Jesus taught that the Spirit's activity is essential in both conversion (turning to God) and regeneration (being "born anew" or of "born again").

Conversion

The Holy Spirit is the convicting agent that starts our turn toward God. This is the beginning of the Christian life from man's perspective.

John 16:8-11 - When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Regeneration

This is the miraculous transformation of the individual and the gift of spiritual energy.

John 3:5-6 - I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

The flesh (or human effort) cannot bring about your transformation. Only the Spirit can produce God's spirit in us.

The Continuation of the Christian Life

The Spirit Empowers Us

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

John 14:12 - I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

How is that possible?

John 16:7 - But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

This empowerment by the Spirit caused the apostles to succeed in their task at that time, and is a resource available today to any Christian wishing to serve the Lord.

The Spirit Lives in the Believer

John 14:16-17 - And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor (the holy Spirit) to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Romans 8:11 - And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

The Holy Spirit Teaches the Believer

1 John 2:27 - As for you, the anointing (the Holy Spirit) you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

The Spirit Sanctifies the Believer

Basically that means that the Holy Spirit is active in the continued transformation of the believer’s moral and spiritual character. The goal is conforming to the image of the Son.

Romans 8:8-11 - Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you...if Christ is in you...your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

The Spirit Bestows Special Gifts to Every Believer

1 Cor. 12:7 - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

The lists of gifts are found in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11 and Eph. 4.11.

Important observations about the gifts:

The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church). They are for the edification of the whole body, not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of individual members possessing them.

No one person has all the gifts, nor is any one of the gifts bestowed on all persons. Consequently, the individual members of the church need each other.

Although not equally well known, all gifts are important.

The Holy Spirit apportions the various gifts to whom and as he wills.

What does the Spirit's work mean to me?

The gifts we have are bestowals upon us by the Holy Spirit. They are not our own accomplishments. They are intended to be used in the fulfillment of his plan.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers in their Christian life and service.

Personal inadequacies should not deter or discourage us.

The Holy Spirit dispenses gifts wisely and sovereignly. Possession or lack of a particular gift is no cause for pride or regret.

No gift is for everyone, and no one has every gift. The fellowship of the body is needed for full spiritual development of the individual believer.

We may rely upon the Holy Spirit to give us understanding of the Word of God, and to guide us into his will for us.

Discussion

When you think of the Holy Spirit's work in the past, what sort of things come to your mind?

What do you think it means to be "filled with the Holy Spirit?"

What is your spiritual gift or gifts? How did you discover them? Is there a difference between gift and talent or ability?