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Who Is the Holy Spirit?

THE INFORMATION AGE is a wonderful time to be alive. It's believed that today a person takes in more information in a few short years than a person living two hundred years ago did in his or her entire life.

While having all this information at our fingertips is empowering, it comes with a price. Ask any doctor on the verge of retirement how different it is to practice medicine in an age when the average patient can attempt to know the intricacies of every ailment versus twenty-five years ago when such a thing was not even a dream. An overload of contradictory information can cause as much confusion as having no information at all.

In a few paragraphs we'll come back to the topic of spirituality in postmodern times, but for now it's enough to realize that before trying to gain a solid understanding of the Holy Spirit, we need to address a few myths about the Spirit that our current culture's spiritual infatuation has created.

Myth: The Holy Spirit is a thing.

In my conversation with people about the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives, I often hear them say things like "Have you got it?" or "Do you feel it?" as if the goal is to receive a certain experience or to somehow get zapped by God. Most of us would never refer to the Holy Spirit as a thing, but we often think of Him in impersonal ways. We see Him as some ethereal cloud that hovers over-

head or some mystical force that just sweeps over people, something like “the force” in *Star Wars*. The Holy Spirit is neither a force nor an impersonal phenomenon.

Reality: He is a person.

Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as a person. In John 16 we find Jesus teaching His disciples about the Holy Spirit. In doing so, He continually refers to the Holy Spirit with the personal pronoun “He” or “Him.” Notice just one verse, verse 13: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” Seven times in this verse alone Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as a person.

Anthropologists tell us that three attributes make up the personality: intellect, will, and emotion. God’s Word tells us that the Holy Spirit possesses all three.

He has intellect.

The first part of Romans 8:27 affirms, “He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit.” Jesus in speaking of the Holy Spirit said He would “teach [us] all things.” Regardless of whether some of us have had teachers who seem to have had no intellect, teaching requires this very trait.

He has will.

The Book of Acts is not so much the acts of the apostles as it is the acts of the Holy Spirit *through* the apostles. Consider Acts 16:6: “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, *having been kept by the Holy Spirit* from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (emphasis added). On several other occasions we discover the Holy Spirit exercising His will. In Acts 13:4 Barnabas and Saul were “sent on their way by the Holy Spirit” or were “compelled by the Spirit” (Acts 20:22). All these things testify to the evidence that the Holy Spirit is a being who exercises His will.

He has emotion.

In Ephesians chapter four, the apostle Paul informs us why we should live holy and upright lives: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit is grieved when we run roughshod over the mercies of God. Grief is a powerful emotion. You can’t grieve an inanimate object. You can grieve only a person with feelings. So besides having an intellect and will, the Holy Spirit is a person with emotion. He is not a force, a mystical presence, or an entity. He is defined by who He is as well as what He does. As long as you primarily seek demonstrations of what He can *do*, you will perceive Him in an impersonal way. Yet He is a person to be loved, to

share life with, and with whom to enjoy a personal relationship.

Myth: He is one among many spirits.

We live in the midst of a spiritual revolution. For generations the prevailing philosophy of enlightenment cast doubt and suspicion over the reality of the spiritual realm. From the era known as the Enlightenment through the period of Modernism, the ultimate test of reality passed through the laboratory. If it couldn't be proved in a test tube, it was neither real nor reliable. But not anymore. The last quarter century, a period we call Post-modernity, has seen a meteoric rise of interest in the spiritual world. Convinced that the meaning of life cannot be limited to the physical senses, the masses are turning to the unseen realm for answers. Consequently we have seen phenomenal increases in occult activity, increased interest in the supernatural and paranormal, and an infatuation with the New Age practices of channeling, astro-projection, and many other mystical practices.

In light of all this is a tendency to interpret the Holy Spirit in this same way, as if He is just one more spirit guide among a smorgasbord of options to help you discover the meaning of life. Yet the Bible makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit is not just one among many spirits at work today.

Reality: He is the third person of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is the divine Spirit, eternally coexistent with the Father and with the Son. *He is God.*

I readily confess to you that I cannot explain the Trinity to your satisfaction. In fact, no one can. The fact that God is three-in-one transcends all human understanding. Regardless of that, we must understand that the Holy Spirit is God. He existed before Creation and was involved in the creative process. In Genesis 1:26 God refers to Christ and the Spirit when He says, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” Christian scholars are united in their understanding that the Holy Spirit *is* God. Whenever He is mentioned in Scripture, He is given the same honor and worship as are the Father and the Son. All the things we ascribe to God we also ascribe to the Holy Spirit. He is omnipotent (all-powerful). He is omniscient (all-knowing). He is omnipresent (all-present). He is not just one more spirit—He is God. He is infinite intellect, perfect will, and perfect emotion. And because of this, He works in perfect concert with the will of God the Father and the work of God the Son.

Another distortion along these same lines implies that the work of the Holy Spirit is somehow unique and different from the work of Jesus Christ. *Beware of any teaching on the Holy Spirit that departs from the work and ministry of Jesus Christ.* They are genuinely one in the same. Look at what Jesus says about the work of the Holy

Spirit in John 16:14: “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work in perfect harmony to reveal himself to us and His plan through us. The Holy Spirit is not just one more spiritual path to discover the meaning of life—He is the only One who can lead us to The Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is God himself revealed to us.

Myth: He is the power of God for special occasions.

The myth that the Holy Spirit is the power of God only for special occasions provides agreement to the fact that the Holy Spirit is God, but it erroneously asserts that the Spirit is His presence and power only at certain times and occasions. There are two prevailing opinions in the Church concerning the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit today.

1. Some maintain that the miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit demonstrated in the New Testament were for that era only. Their rationale dictates that those supernatural phenomena were necessary to birth the Church but ceased when the apostles died.
2. The other prevailing view is that the miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit are indicative of what He wants to do today. These acts play a role that is

just as important today as when the church was born two thousand years ago.

If Christ's great commission to "go into all the world and make disciples" is for us today as much as it was for His disciples then, it only stands to reason that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are just as necessary today to fulfill Christ's great commission as they were back then. The Holy Spirit is not the power of God just for special occasions.

Reality: He is available 24/7.

If the Holy Spirit is not available at all times, how else could Jesus promise, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)? He said to His disciples, "Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). I don't think Jesus' disciples fully understood when He told them that it was *good* for Him to go away. They probably reasoned, "God has come to live with us in Christ. What could be better than that?" Yet just a few weeks later on the day of Pentecost, Jesus' promise came true: "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). These same troubled and defeated disciples suddenly realized, "The God who came to live *with* us now lives *in* us as the Holy Spirit." Are you beginning to see God's wonderful plan to reveal himself to us and redeem His lost creation?

Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect intimacy and closeness with God in the Garden. But they sinned and disobeyed. Their sin destroyed that intimacy and brought separation from God. But God the Father immediately began building a bridge back to His fallen yet beloved creation. In the Old Testament *God spoke through His prophets*. And in the fullness of time, God came to Earth and revealed himself as the Son. In the New Testament Gospels *God spoke through His Son*. God is getting closer. He walked among humanity, lived with humanity, and suffered *for* and *with* humanity.

However, God moved a step closer two thousand years ago on the Day of Pentecost when He revealed himself as the blessed Holy Spirit. In both the New Testament and today, God speaks through His Spirit. The God who had walked *with* us now comes to live *in* us. You can't get more personal than that! That's the miracle of the Holy Spirit. He makes the promise of closeness and intimacy with God a reality—not just on Sunday but every day.

Is the light bulb turning on for you? Are you saying to yourself, *Wow—that's really what I need! I need the Holy Spirit to help me know that I am loved and close to God again. How do I get there? What do I need to do?* According to God's Word, simply ask. This is Jesus' promise for you today. "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

Throughout my years of dealing with people regarding their relationships with God, I've discovered many who testify, "I've trusted in Jesus as my Savior. I know He died for my sins, and I'm trying to live for Him." But the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is not a living reality to them. They understand the gospel in their heads and believe it in their hearts, but God still seems distant to them, and the Christian life seems unattainable to them. Those who are in this place need the witness of the Holy Spirit living within them. Jesus reminds us that receiving Him is as simple as asking God the Father for Him. When we open our hearts and invite the Holy Spirit to bear witness with our spirits that we are children of God, it is His promise to do so for all who sincerely ask with all their hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who makes real *in* us what Jesus Christ has done *for* us.