

The Divinity of *the* Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 5:1–4; 1 Cor. 2:10, 11; Isa. 63:10–14; Titus 3:4–6; Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:2.*

Memory Text: “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, NASB*).

All through the Bible, the deity of God the Father is simply assumed. We find this truth expressed both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. It is one of the most crucial and foundational of the many revealed truths in the Word of God.

The deity of Jesus also is affirmed in many places in Scripture, especially, of course, in the New Testament, both in the Gospels and the Epistles.

However, the deity of the Holy Spirit is taught in more subtle terms. It can be inferred from various indirect biblical statements. Here we need to compare scripture with scripture in order to study carefully what God has revealed in His Word about the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we should not affirm less than what Scripture states, and we also should not “exceed what is written” (*1 Cor. 4:6, NASB*). This topic demands a teachable attitude of humility; we should not make our human reasoning about God the standard of how the Holy Spirit should be understood. Instead, we should accept and testify to what Scripture affirms, no matter how hard some of the concepts might be for us to grasp fully.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 21.

The Holy Spirit and God

The Bible does not present a systematic description of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Instead, we find interesting traces that indicate that the biblical writers considered the Holy Spirit to be equal with God. There are several biblical passages where the same activity is attributed to God and then also to the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 5:1–4. What can we conclude about God and the Holy Spirit from Peter’s words to Ananias?

If the Holy Spirit were not God, then Peter would have been speaking here in a very careless and fatally misleading manner. The interesting aspect about the nature of the Holy Spirit, however, is the fact that the apostle Peter puts God and the Holy Spirit on the same level. In Acts 5:3, he asks Ananias why he has lied to the Holy Spirit, and he continues at the end of Acts 5:4: “ ‘You have not lied to men but to God’ ” (*NASB*). Peter clearly equates the Holy Spirit with God. His point is that Ananias was lying not just to the apostles, but to God Himself. Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. The Holy Spirit is God. The point is made here very clearly.

Why such a harsh punishment for what these two people did?

We must remember that the believers of the early church in Acts were “one in heart and mind” (*Acts 4:32, NIV*). This unity was a product of the Holy Spirit, and this is the reason they voluntarily and freely shared what they possessed. To lie with regard to the sharing was to deny the unity of the community and to belie the Spirit that undergirded that unity and made it possible.

This is why the lie of Ananias and his wife falsified the divine work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the early church community. Such dishonesty toward God is destructive and hinders the Spirit of God from working effectively in the lives of believers. God wants us to serve Him undividedly. Because the new faith community was at a crucial juncture, God used drastic consequences to make sure that the new church would work in unison and truthfulness with one another and be willing to be led by His Spirit.

Think how easily Ananias and Sapphira may have justified their sin. After all, haven’t we sold our own property and given some of it to the church? What’s the big deal if we keep a little? What should this story tell us about how careful we need to be regarding how we justify our actions?

The Holy Spirit's Divine Attributes

In several biblical passages the Holy Spirit is described as having divine attributes.

What attributes and activities of the Holy Spirit are listed in the following Bible passages that, otherwise, can be attributed only to God?

1 Cor. 2:10, 11; compare with Isa. 40:13, 14 _____

Ps. 139:7 _____

Heb. 9:14; compare with 1 Tim. 6:16 _____

Luke 1:35; Rom. 15:19; compare with Ps. 104:30 _____

In his examination of the wisdom of God, Paul argues that it is the Holy Spirit who makes this wisdom known to us. “Like knows like” is the reasoning Paul employs here in his argument. Only one who is equal to God can know the deep things of God (*1 Cor. 2:10, 11*). There is no knowing God as does the Spirit, for He knows God from the inside. He knows in a way that an outsider does not. The Holy Spirit is indeed omniscient.

The presence of the Spirit is the presence of God. If I cannot flee to a place where the Spirit of God is not, He is omnipresent (*compare with Ps. 139:7*).

The Holy Spirit is said to be eternal (*Heb. 9:14*). According to the Bible, how many eternal beings are there? Only God is eternal (*1 Tim. 6:16*). If the Spirit is called eternal, then He must be God.

The Holy Spirit also is all-powerful or almighty. In Luke 1:35 the phrases “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the most High” (*NASB*) are synonymous constructions. Here they refer to a miracle of the first magnitude, the virgin conception. In Romans 15:19, the apostle Paul acknowledges that his ministry was achieved by “mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (*NKJV*). Indeed, the Holy Spirit can do divine miracles.

Jesus also says that blasphemy against the Spirit is unforgivable (*Matt. 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28, 29*). This is incomprehensible unless the Spirit is divine.

But perhaps the most amazing work of the Holy Spirit is His ability to change human hearts and minds. It is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes a new spiritual birth (*John 3:5–8*). He has the power to accomplish something that only God can do.

Biblical Hints

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

Read Isaiah 63:10–14 and compare it with Numbers 14:11 and Deuteronomy 32:12. To whom was the writer referring in these passages, and what does this tell us about the divinity of the Holy Spirit?

In Isaiah 63:10, the people rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit. However, the parallel account, as found in Numbers 14:11, states that “the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will this people spurn me?’” (*NASB*). And in Deuteronomy 32:12, we are told that “‘the LORD alone guided him, and there was no foreign god with him’” (*NASB*). Obviously the biblical writers saw God and the Holy Spirit on par with each other.

In 2 Samuel 23:2, we read that “‘the Spirit of the LORD spoke by me’” (*NASB*), whereas in the parallel statement in 2 Samuel 23:3, it says: “‘The God of Israel said . . . to me’” (*NASB*). Again, the conclusion from this biblical parallel is that the Holy Spirit is considered to be equal to God.

Compare 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 with 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, and compare 1 Corinthians 12:11 with 1 Corinthians 12:28. How are the references to the Holy Spirit and to God used interchangeably in these passages? What is attributed to God and to the Holy Spirit alike?

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, Paul uses similar language as in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. For the apostle Paul, to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to be inhabited by God. By equating the expression “God’s temple” (*NIV*) with a temple “of the Holy Spirit” (*NIV*), Paul points out that the Holy Spirit is God.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul writes that it is the Holy Spirit who distributes the spiritual gifts to each believer. A few verses later in 1 Corinthians 12:28, we are told that it is God who is doing it. The basic message is clear: the Holy Spirit does the same action as God is doing, powerful evidence that the Holy Spirit is equal to God.

Read again Numbers 14:11. In what ways might this be applied to us today? Think about the miraculous ways God has worked in our church. Think about all the reasons He has given us to believe. How can we make sure we aren’t doing today what God’s people did thousands of years ago?

Divine Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit performs certain works, which the Bible ascribes only to God. He is active in the divine work of the Creation, and He is just as active in God's re-creation of sinners.

Read Titus 3:4–6. How does Paul describe the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the process of re-creation?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned side by side with “God our Savior” (*Titus 3:4, NASB*) in the context of the washing of regeneration (baptism) and our spiritual renewal (*Titus 3:5*). He is the agent of our new birth. He renews our hearts. He awakens our desire to follow Christ. He is the Spirit of life (*Rom. 8:2*). He is the One who sanctifies sinners and transforms our characters. He helps us to be obedient to Jesus Christ, who saved us. Only a Divine Being is capable of such wonderful things.

Compare Isaiah 6:8–10 with Acts 28:25–27. To whom do the biblical writers attribute the divine speaking?

There are several biblical passages in which, on the one hand, God is said to be speaking and in which other biblical writers state that the Holy Spirit is said to be speaking. It is the Holy Spirit who supernaturally imparted the Holy Scriptures to us (*2 Pet. 1:21*), something that elsewhere is described as God's inspiration (*2 Tim. 3:16*). Giving the Scriptures is another divine work of the Spirit.

What does Romans 8:11 teach us about the divinity of the Holy Spirit?

The Bible states that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and will also raise us. Only God has the power to raise people from the dead. Hence, the Holy Spirit is God.

What are changes you can make that would cause you to be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit? That is, what practices might be keeping you from clearly discerning His leading in your life?

The Importance of His Divinity

What would be lost if the Holy Spirit were not God? If the Holy Spirit is not fully God, the implications for salvation and worship are serious. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is responsible for regenerating believers. He dwells in us and fills us. He renews our thinking and changes our characters. He has the power to resurrect. He makes Christ's followers as God is: holy. If the Holy Spirit is not God, how can we be certain that He can do any of these things and do them in such a way that they are acceptable to God?

Read 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Matthew 28:18, 19. What does the fact that the Holy Spirit is mentioned side by side with God the Father, and Jesus Christ, the Son, in baptism and benedictions tell us about the place of the Holy Spirit in the adoration and worship of God?

The divinity of the Holy Spirit helps us to relate to Him in appropriate ways that acknowledge Him for who He truly is. His divinity is the presupposition for a God-centered spirituality. The New Testament church without hesitation mentions the Holy Spirit side by side with the other two members of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit occupies the same rank and position in the act of baptism as do the Father and the Son. Baptism has a deep spiritual significance and is an ordinance of profound worship. What is true in the act of baptism is equally true of the apostolic benediction. It is an invocation of adoration where the Holy Spirit is praised just as are the Father and the Son. All three persons of the Godhead are mentioned side by side and are affirmed equally.

The Holy Spirit is affirmed as a proper object of worship in the New Testament, not just in baptism and in the apostolic benediction but also in the constant requirement that we depend on Him for all spiritual good and should obey Him as our divine teacher and sanctifier. Does it matter that the Holy Spirit is God? Yes, very much so. If we know who He truly is, and recognize and acknowledge His deity, we will honor His work and rely on Him for our own personal growth and sanctification.

Think about what it means that the Holy Spirit, God Himself, is working in your life. What great promises are found here for us in knowing that it is God who is working in us to change us into what we can be in Him? Why is this an uplifting and affirming truth?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Misrepresentations of the Godhead,” pp. 613–617, in *Evangelism*.

As we have seen this week, the biblical evidence for the divinity of the Holy Spirit is very convincing. The Holy Spirit is God. But remember: in thinking about the Holy Spirit, we are dealing with a divine mystery. We reiterate the point: just as we cannot fully explain God and His nature, we have to resist the temptation to make our human comprehension the norm for how God should be. Truth goes far beyond human comprehension, especially when that truth deals with the nature of God Himself.

At the same time, faith in the divinity of the Holy Spirit means more than accepting the bare teaching of the Trinity. It includes reliance on and confidence in the saving work of God as it is commissioned by the Father and accomplished through the Son in the power of the Spirit. “It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. . . . The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 51, 52.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Though his context was quite different from what Ellen G. White wrote above, the principle is the same. That is, why is it better to keep silent about aspects of God and of spiritual truth in general that have not been revealed by Inspiration?
- ② Sometimes it is helpful to reflect upon a theological position by asking the question: *What would be lost if the proposal were untrue?* For instance: *What would be lost if Christ were not divine?* With regard to the Holy Spirit, reflect on the following question: *What would be lost if the Holy Spirit were not fully God?*
- ③ What does the following quote say to us on a practical level? “The Holy Spirit, who is to fill us, is not some vague influence or mystic force. He is a divine Person, to be received with deep humility, veneration, and obedience. Therefore it is not a question of our having more of Him, but of His having more of us—yes, all there is of us.”—LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter*, p. 159.