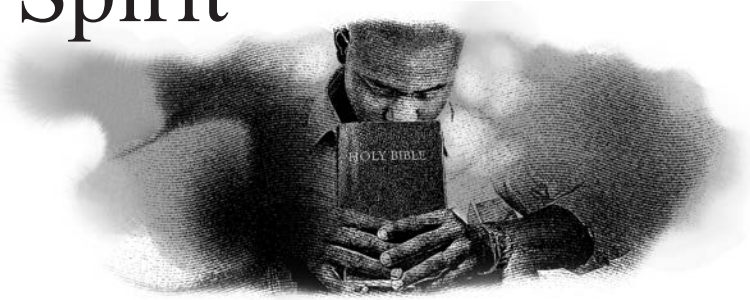


The Personality of *the* Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 16:13, 14; Rom. 8:14–16; Rom. 15:13; John 14:6; John 17:17; Rom. 5:5.*

Memory Text: “‘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, NASB*).

Because the Holy Spirit is occasionally depicted in the Bible in impersonal terms, such as wind or fire, some have concluded that He is impersonal, a type of divine power. In their view, He is more like an electric current that empowers us rather than existing as a personal Being. But the question is not whether some passages can be brought forward that denote more impersonal operations or influences of the Holy Spirit. The question is whether there are numerous portions of Scripture that positively do establish His personality.

There are texts, and we need to take them into consideration in order to gain a more complete picture of who the Holy Spirit is.

This week we will learn more about the personality of the Holy Spirit as He is described in Scripture. This truth will help us better understand the role of God's divine Spirit in our lives. And it will help us to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of the belief in the personality of the Holy Spirit for our spiritual life. Only when we entertain right thoughts about Him can we render to Him that love, reverence, confidence, and submission that are due to Him.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 28.

Jesus' Description of the Holy Spirit

Read John 16:13, 14; John 15:26, 27; and John 14:17, 26. What very personal characteristics does Jesus attribute to the Holy Spirit in these passages? What does it mean to you that Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as a Helper or Comforter (*parakletos*)?

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit *guides, speaks, hears, discloses, and glorifies* (John 16:13, 14, NASB). The Holy Spirit also *teaches and reminds us* (John 14:26). He *dwells in us* (John 14:17), He *testifies* (John 15:24, 26), and He *convicts* (John 16:8). These sound more like the actions of a sovereign personality than they do an impersonal force.

Read John 14:16–18. How would Jesus' promise be fulfilled? How are the disciples not left alone?

Jesus cares for His followers. He would not leave His disciples as orphans. He promised to send the Holy Spirit. Jesus here specifically says that He will send “another helper” or “comforter.” The words that Jesus uses here are significant. He promises to send *another* helper. Not a *different* one. The Greek word for “another” is *allos*. In the Greek language of the New Testament *allos* indicates that Christ will send another comforter who is numerically distinct but is of the same character; that is, who is similar to Himself. In other words, Jesus promises *One like Himself*, One who will take His place, One who will continue to do His work in us, and who is His representative.

This work of the Holy Spirit is the work of a helper or comforter. The Bible here uses the Greek word *parakletos* (John 14:16) to describe someone who is called upon for support, for assistance; someone called to our aid. Just as Jesus is a Person, the Holy Spirit is also personal. This idea is supported by the fact that personal attributes are often ascribed to the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26, 15:26, Acts 15:28, Rom. 8:26, 1 Cor. 12:11, 1 Tim. 4:1).

Why is it so much more *comforting* to know that the Holy Spirit is a personality instead of a mere force?

Personal Aspects of the Holy Spirit: Part 1

As you read the following texts, ask yourself if they sound as if they are talking about an impersonal force or about a divine Person. *Rom. 8:14–16, 27; 15:30; 1 Cor. 2:10; Acts 8:29; 10:19, 20; 28:25.*

Can an impersonal force intercede in our behalf? Does an impersonal spirit or power have the ability to reveal to us things about God? Does an impersonal influence have the ability to speak? All those biblical statements make much more sense if the Holy Spirit is a personal being as opposed to some impersonal force.

Read the following texts. What personal attributes are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in these passages? *Eph. 4:30; Acts 5:3, 9; 1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 15:30.*

The distinctive characteristics of personality are knowledge (or understanding), feeling, and will. Only a personal being can be grieved. Only a personal being can be deceived and lied to. Only a personal being has the ability to choose as he wills and has his own volition. The will is perhaps one of the most distinctive elements and characteristics in any personality. And only a personal being has the capacity to love. True love is not conceivable in an abstract and impersonal manner. Love comes with a very personal touch. These predicates of personality indicate that the Holy Spirit is a self-conscious, self-knowing, self-willing, and self-determining Being, capable of love. He is not a shadowy effluence or an impersonal essence. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in these personal ways because God Himself is a personal God.

“The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 617.

How does the biblical perspective that the Holy Spirit has characteristics of a personality impact our relationship with Him? What would be different if the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal power as opposed to God Himself?

Personal Aspects of the Holy Spirit: Part 2

A challenge we face in understanding the Holy Spirit is that we can imagine God as a Father in a somewhat tangible way. Many also have a concrete picture of Jesus, as He is described in the Gospels. He took our human nature and appeared to us in human form.

The Holy Spirit, however, is presented in a very different manner. He is seemingly impalpable, much harder to comprehend than are the Father and the Son.

Hence, some draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is only an impersonal power. As we have seen so far, that idea doesn't really do justice to the nature of the Holy Spirit. In fact, there are statements in the Bible that would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal force or (divine) power.

Carefully read the following two passages and see if they make sense if you replace the reference to the Holy Spirit with the impersonal word *power*. Why do these texts make sense only if the Holy Spirit is, indeed, a Person?

Rom. 15:13 _____

1 Cor. 2:4 _____

The statement of the apostles that “ ‘it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’ ” (*Acts 15:28, NASB*) would be absurd if the Holy Spirit were only a power or an impersonal influence. The statement instead indicates another personal being, much the same as both the Father and Son are personal beings.

Furthermore, how can believers be baptized “ ‘in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, NASB*) if the first two who are mentioned are Persons but the third mentioned is not? That doesn't make the best sense. Instead, all three are mentioned as being part of the same one name in whom we are baptized. Thus, the Holy Spirit is revealed here to be on the same level as God the Father and God the Son.

Ellen G. White has perceptively stated that “there are three living persons of the heavenly trio . . . the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615. She, too, is very clear about the existent personality of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth

Read John 14:6 and 17:17. What is the meaning of truth in these passages?

In the Gospel of John, the word *truth* is a key term. Our contemporary understanding of truth often is very abstract and theoretical. In the Western world it has been shaped by Greek philosophy. However, in the Bible, and particularly in John's Gospel, truth carries a rather personal and specific meaning: Jesus is the truth (*John 14:6*). While God's Written Word is truthful (*compare with John 17:17, Ps. 119:142*), God's truth is revealed in a supreme way in the person of Jesus Christ. A true knowledge of God is given to us in Jesus, of whom the Scriptures speak, because God has revealed Himself through Him.

Read John 15:26 and 16:13. What function does the Holy Spirit have as the Spirit of truth?

In John 16:13 we are told that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. He does this by pointing to Jesus Christ and by helping us to remember what Jesus has said (*John 15:26*) and done for us. The truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us is very personal: He lifts up Jesus and leads us into a living and faithful relationship with Him. When Jesus talked with the woman of Samaria, He said that God must be worshiped in spirit and truth (*John 4:24*). When we ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to Jesus, who is the way and the truth and the life (*John 14:6*).

Truth in the Bible is no abstract thing or theory, such as often appears in philosophy. Truth encompasses a deeply personal and faithful relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, who is called "the God of all truth" (*compare with Deut. 32:4, Ps. 31:5*). Thus, the Holy Spirit is aptly called the "Spirit of truth" (*John 14:17, NASB; 16:13, NASB*), who is sent to us from God the Father (*John 15:26*), indicating not only His personal character but also His divinity.

We do tend to think of truth in terms of propositions, such as the logical concept known as *modus ponens*. "If A, then B. A, therefore B." And no question, a lot of what we understand as truth we understand as propositions. How, though, do you understand the idea of truth as a Person? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Why Does It Matter?

The question of the personality of the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance, and it has highly practical implications. “If He is a divine person, and we think of Him as an impersonal influence, we are robbing a divine person of the deference, honor, and love that is His due.” —LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 40.

If we think of the Holy Spirit only as a mysterious divine power, our thoughts will be: *How can I have more of the Holy Spirit?* But if we think of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person, we will ask: *How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?* The decisive point is: Do you want to possess the Holy Spirit, or do you want the Holy Spirit to possess you? Do you resist His influence, or are you willing to follow Him in joyful obedience (*see Rom. 8:12–14, Gal. 5:18–24*)? Do you want to use the Holy Spirit according to your plans, or do you rely on Him so that He can enable you to become more like Jesus Christ and do what He has in mind for you? Do you take seriously the fact that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” (*1 Cor. 6:19, NASB*), and are you willing to glorify God with how you live?

Read Romans 5:5 and Ephesians 2:18, 19. How are the Holy Spirit and God’s love connected? What impact does that have on you personally and on the church?

People consciously choose to cooperate with one another. We are invited to work together with the Holy Spirit, while He leads and transforms us personally and God’s church corporately. If we do not accept the Holy Spirit as a Person of the triune Godhead, it will be easier for us to ignore Him, to deafen our ears to His invitation, and to harden our hearts against His life-changing influence. And because we are fallen, sin-damaged beings in need of God’s transforming grace, the last thing we need to do is ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If anything, we need to give more of ourselves to Him. Thus, in our acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person who wants to use us, God stands at the center of our Christian experience.

“We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 672. What do you think Ellen G. White meant by that? How can the Holy Spirit use us? (*See Phil. 2:13.*)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” pp. 669–672, in *The Desire of Ages*, where she speaks about the Holy Spirit. Also read “Dealing With False Science, Cults, Isms, and Secret Societies,” pp. 613–617, in *Evangelism*.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (*Matt. 28:18–20, NKJV*). Notice, as Jesus gave them their calling and work, He said to baptize disciples in the “name,” *singular*; of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He didn’t say “names” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but just “name” (Greek *onoma*). This is more powerful proof of the triune nature of our One God (“ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ ” [Deut. 6:4, NKJV]). As this week’s lesson has already pointed out, no one questions the personality of the Father and the Son; thus, why should anyone do that with the personality and personhood of the Holy Spirit? According to the Bible, we have the loving, caring, and comforting presence of God Himself working in us and through us. That’s who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. And how much nicer it is to know that this abiding presence is a Person, just as much as the Father and Jesus are. Yes, it’s hard to fully understand. But so what? If we can’t fully understand the nature of something as basic as light or wind, how much more so will we not be able to fully understand the nature of the Holy Spirit Himself?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s question about truth being a Person, Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Why would Jesus be the Truth? How do we understand “truth” that way—instead of seeing it merely as precepts or propositions?
- 2 Ellen G. White wrote: “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 616. What does this tell us about the reality and presence of the Holy Spirit?
- 3 Go back over some of the traits and characteristics of the Holy Spirit that we have seen this week. Which ones are especially comforting to you? Which one means the most to you? Share in class why you chose what you did.
- 4 What can you better relate to, an impersonal force or a personality? What are the implications of your answer?