

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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Introduction

- There is more than a bit of mystery associated with the Holy Spirit. Consider the imagery used to describe Him and His work.
 - Examples include wind/breath, fire, dove, counselor, teacher, outpouring/filling, anointing oil, fruit, and seal (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 390-93).
 - There are both personal and impersonal images.
 - Some images are shrouded in mystery (fire, wind, etc.).
- We may be a bit uncomfortable talking about the Holy Spirit, but we need to overcome that tendency.
 - The sense of mystery may put us off. After all, we live in an age of great scientific and technological advances, and the notion of a mysterious spiritual being does not seem to fit.
 - We may have concluded that some Christians, churches, and denominations place excessive or misguided emphasis on the Holy Spirit. If so, we may unintentionally swing too far in another direction.
 - Ultimately, our view of, and emphasis on, the Holy Spirit need to coincide with the message of the Scriptures. The place that He occupies in our thoughts, conversation, and teaching should be consistent with the importance and role that he holds in the New Testament.
- The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not insignificant. It is introduced in the Bible's opening verses (Gen. 1:2) and continues through its final chapter (Rev. 22:17). Some years ago I developed a 3-lesson series outlining the New Testament's teaching on the Holy Spirit. That series, covering dozens of New Testament passages, left much territory unexplored. Today's lesson can only scratch the surface of all that the Bible has to offer, but even so, it will contain enough truth to change our lives.
- Exercise
 - Ask participants to recall a place in the Bible that mentions the Holy Spirit, and, ideally, to identify the book or specific location where it occurs. Ask for volunteers to share the phrase/verse/passage that came to their minds. Note where the references are located.
 - Observe (presumably) that most/all of them are in the New Testament. Ask for suggestions as to why this may be. Point out that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit flowers in the New Testament versus its limited development in the Old (Blomberg 345).

¹ This lesson employs an outline developed by the staff of Seminole Baptist Temple (Springfield, MO) for use in 2011. The content within the outline, however, is mine. All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

- The New Testament mentions the Holy Spirit more times than the Old Testament, even though the Old is longer than the New.
- The New Testament reveals the Holy Spirit's nature and work more clearly than the Old.
- The New Testament portrays the Holy Spirit as having a more consistent (though not fully predictable!) ministry than the Old.
- The Spirit is very much present and active in the accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry, but there is a definite coming of the Holy Spirit in greater power following Jesus' ascension to heaven (Acts 2).

I. The Person and Nature of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force.
 - As noted above, the Scriptures use both personal and impersonal images to describe Him (e.g., counselor and teacher vs. wind and fire).
 - Describing someone using imagery of something non-personal does not mean he/she is something less than a person. For example, if I say, "Kobe Bryant is a machine," I have not denied his personal nature. Rather, I have stated that he shares certain attributes with a machine—namely, his ability to produce results on the basketball court in a seemingly routine manner.
- The Holy Spirit is not just any person, but the third member of the Godhead. He is co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. He shares the same attributes, being omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, perfectly holy, righteous, loving, etc.
- As we proceed to examine the Holy Spirit's work and our relationship to Him, we will find clear evidence of His personal character.

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. He is a Spirit of revelation

- *2 Peter 1:20-21*

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- *John 16:12-14*

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

- The author of the epistle to the Hebrews specifically attributes the revelation of three Old Testament books to the Holy Spirit: Leviticus (9:6-8: “By this the Holy Spirit indicates”), Psalms (3:7-11: “as the Holy Spirit says”), and Jeremiah (10:15-17: “the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us”). By inference, we may conclude that He is responsible for all of them.

2. He brings conviction

- *John 16:7-11*
⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

3. He extends an invitation

- *1 Thessalonians 1:4-5*
⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.
- As the Revealer of prophecy and Scripture, He is the voice of God calling us to reconciliation and fellowship with Him.

4. He effects regeneration

- *John 3:3, 5-8*
³ Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” . . . ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
- *Titus 3:4-7*
⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

5. He indwells believers

- *John 14:16-17*
¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it

neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

- *Romans 8:8-9*

⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

6. He teaches believers

- *John 14:25-26*

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ 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 have said to you.”

- *John 15:26-27*

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

7. He makes intercession for believers

- *Romans 8:26-27*

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

8. The Holy Spirit brings unity to God’s people

- *Ephesians 4:1-4*

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call . . .

9. The Holy Spirit empowers God’s people for service

- The earthly ministry of Jesus provides a clear example of Spirit-empowered service. The Spirit was involved in the Lord’s . . .
 - physical conception (Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:35)
 - baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32)
 - introduction by John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)
 - temptation (Matt. 4:1ff; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2)
 - overall ministry (Matt. 3:11; 12:28; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 4:14; John 1:33)
- The Holy Spirit’s power is a significant theme in the book of Acts.
 - He is the Source of believers’ spiritual power (1:8) as He was in Jesus’ ministry (1:2; 10:38).

- The Spirit led, empowered, and emboldened the apostles and their converts to witness for Christ (e.g., 4:8ff.; 5:30-32), confront falsehood (13:9ff.), carry out the ministry and expansion of the church (e.g., 6:2-6; 9:31), and maintain doctrinal integrity (15:28-29).

10. The Holy Spirit equips believers with spiritual gifts

- The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is a gift to all believers (Acts 5:32; 8:18-24). But not only is He Himself a gift; He is a giver of spiritual gifts—gifts that build up the church (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26) and bear witness to God’s salvation (Heb. 2:3-4).
- The New Testament contains four “lists” of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Only one of these appears in an extended discussion of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14).
- The New Testament record does not answer all of our curiosities about spiritual gifts, but it does make some essential facts clear:
 - There is a diverse range of gifts.
 - All gifts serve the purpose of glorifying God and edifying the church.
 - Gifts are to be exercised lovingly and in an orderly fashion.
 - All gifts are useful, but some appear to be better than others.
- There is no prescribed formula for discovering one’s gifts, nor is identifying them stated as a necessity. An attitude of service is more important than the exact nature of one’s gifts. It is our responsibility to surrender ourselves to the Lord’s service; it is His to ensure that we are capable of carrying out the ministries to which He appoints us.

III. Our Response to the Holy Spirit

A. We are to be in fellowship with Him

- *2 Corinthians 13:14*
¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- As 2 Corinthians 13:14 states, our fellowship with God entails all three members of the Godhead. Ephesians 2:11-18 teaches that Christ’s sacrifice enables the church to grow as a temple where God can dwell by His Spirit. This is not only the case in an eschatological sense, but is realized on a local level wherever Christians maintain unity in fellowship with the Spirit.
- God’s design is for us to foster an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. However, if we neglect or reject his influence, we can grieve (Eph. 4:30) or quench (1 Thess. 5:19) Him.

B. We are to be filled by Him

- *Ephesians 5:18-20*
¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing

and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- Ephesians 5:18 speaks of being “filled with the Spirit.” The *NET Bible* notes that the grammar likely refers to the Spirit as the *means*—not the *content*—of our filling.
- Based on a variety of contextual factors, we may conclude that being filled with/by the Spirit entails the following aspects, whether in essence or association:
 - surrendering control to the Holy Spirit’s will, thus maximizing “the impact of his indwelling presence” (Woodcock 73)
 - giving attention to corporate spiritual life, including exhortation, worship, thanksgiving, and mutual submission
 - speaking on behalf of God
 - exercising faith leading to joy and spiritual victory
 - waiting God to effect the filling
 - continuing in an attitude of prayer
 - keeping our minds on God’s Word

C. We are to produce His fruit

- *Galatians 5:22-23*
²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- Galatians 5 has much to say about life in the Spirit.
 - The fruit of the Spirit stands in contrast to the works of the flesh (vv. 19-21).
 - Furthermore, we are instructed to walk in/by the Spirit (v. 16) and to be led by Him (v. 18).
- We cannot directly control the production of fruit—whether in the physical realm or the spiritual. All we can do is attempt to create the conditions under which fruit is likely to grow. “A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit” (Foster 7).
- Too often we let circumstances dominate our thought and actions rather than being under the Spirit’s control and demonstrating His fruit.

Conclusion

- “The experience of the Spirit is like the experience of breathing: one is not conscious of it all the time, but if one is not conscious of it at least sometimes, something is wrong.” —
Attributed to theologian James D. G. Dunn

Related Resources by the Author (Available at word-smith.info)

- The Holy Spirit in the New Testament
- A Balanced Approach to Spiritual Gifts
- Paul's Directives in 1 Corinthians 14
- The Filling of the Spirit
- Speaking for the Lord: The Prerequisite of Spiritual Fullness

Sources

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