

# The Mystery of the Spirit

## The Deity of the Spirit

### Lecture 2

#### Holy Spirit – an Essential Study

Millard Erickson, a contemporary Baptist theologian and author of the acclaimed text **Christian Theology**, explains why the Holy Spirit is an essential study today.<sup>1</sup>

1. **The Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity first becomes personal to the believer.** This is because salvation only occurs when the Holy Spirit draws us to believe. And then, having believed, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer – enabling the believer to serve with spiritual gifts and filling the believer to exhibit the moral attributes of God.
2. **We live in the period in which the Holy Spirit’s work is more prominent than that of the other members of the Trinity.** The Father was most conspicuous in the Old Testament – where the Son only appeared cryptically as the Angel of the Lord, and the Spirit came upon people at special moments but not necessarily continually. The Son is most conspicuous in the Gospels up until the time of His ascension, from which time He has not been visible on earth. But starting with Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been the operative member of the Godhead on earth. If we are to be close to God in this present age, we must be familiar with the Spirit.
3. **Our culture stresses the experiential, and it is primarily through the Holy Spirit that we experience God.**

#### Holy Spirit – a Difficult Study

As essential as it is to know the Holy Spirit, it is also difficult. There are several reasons why.

1. **The Bible reveals much more about the Father and the Son than it does the Holy Spirit.** This is reflective of the Holy Spirit’s role, which is to glorify – or direct attention to – the Son and the Father.

John 16:14 (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> He will **glorify Me**, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you.

Galatians 4:6 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent forth the **Spirit** of His Son into your hearts, **crying out, “Abba, Father!”**

Furthermore, the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son – or, as the revision of the Nicene Creed puts it “proceeds from the Father and from the Son.”

Parenthetically, this statement in the revised creed was one of the most hotly contested issues in Christendom – known as the *filioque* clause (“and from the Son”). The original

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<sup>1</sup> Millard Erickson, **Christian Theology**, p. 846.

Nicene Creed read that the Spirit proceeded from the Father. The Western church, probably to combat Arianism which denied the co-equality of the Son as God, began adding “and from the Son”. The Eastern Church objected. They would agree to “proceeds from the Father through the Son”, but not “proceeds from the Son”. This was because they viewed the Father as having sole rule over the Son and Spirit. They also failed to see biblical basis for saying the Spirit was sent by the Son.

This controversy was so severe that the Eastern Church excommunicated the Roman Pope, and the Roman Pope excommunicated the Eastern Patriarch. From that point onward, Catholicism in the West and Orthodoxy in the East split.

So, is it wrong to say the Spirit was sent by the Son? You be the judge . . .

John 15:26 (NKJV)

<sup>26</sup> “But when the Helper comes, whom **I shall send** to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

John 16:7 (NKJV)

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless 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 depart, **I will send Him** to you.

It is true, however, that most references in the bible, including all Old Testament references, are about the Father sending the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and **He will give you** another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

John 14:26 (NKJV)

<sup>26</sup> 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 things that I said to you.

I should also point out that while the *filioque* clause was the point at which the church split, it probably wasn't the real cause. East and West had been at odds with one another for centuries. The *filioque* clause was merely one light straw that broke the metaphorical camel's back.

2. **The Holy Spirit is difficult to conceptualise precisely because He is a Spirit** – or as the King James called Him, a Ghost. How do you picture a Spirit? We do not have the same difficulty with the Father – even though He, too, is a Spirit. The role of Father is something we can easily relate to. The Son is the easiest to conceptualise since He became flesh and dwelt among us. We have a wealth of true life human stories about the Son in the Gospels.
3. **The Holy Spirit is misrepresented by non-Christian and pseudo-Christian religions (who view Him to be an impersonal force), and by certain segments of Christianity.** Extremes are problematic – from the Charismatics who have a fascination with the Spirit that exceeds the biblical data, to the hyper-cessationists who, for fear of looking like a Charismatic, downplay the Holy Spirit to be less than the biblical data.

The latter heresy has its roots in distant church history. The Arians, because of their misinterpretation of texts that speak of the Son's subordination to the Father, and the Spirit's subordination to the Son, extended this to mean a lesser status and essence. Hence, the Father is the genuine God, the Son is a lesser God, and the Spirit is either lesser still, or not a personal deity at all. The Trinity then becomes FATHER, Son, and holy spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Incidentally, the modern day Jehovah's Witnesses are related to the second century Arians.

Charismatics, too, have early church relatives in the second century. They were known as the Montanists – emphasising immediate revelation from God, speaking in tongues and a deep concern for moral, separated living. The Montanists, however, were a short-lived movement – falling into dormancy in the third century and not reviving until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We'll talk more about Pentecostalism and Charismaticism in a later session.

## Who is the Holy Spirit?

In our first session, we answered this question by saying the Holy Spirit is a person. The importance of this point cannot be overstated. If the Holy Spirit is not a person, then there is no Trinity, and most of our Christian experiences are reduced to wild imaginations or silly superstitions.

But we know the Spirit is a person. Not only does the Bible refer to the Holy Spirit with personal pronouns ("he"), it also attributes to the Holy Spirit emotions, will and intellect – the signs of personhood.

Beyond this, the Holy Spirit is named together with the Father and the Son, indicating equality of personhood. We viewed a few examples in our first session. Here are two more:

Jude 20-21 (NKJV)

<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the **Holy Spirit**, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of **God**, looking for the mercy of our **Lord Jesus Christ** unto eternal life.

1 Peter 1:2 (NKJV)

<sup>2</sup> elect according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in sanctification of the **Spirit**, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of **Jesus Christ**: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

So the Holy Spirit is a person. That leads to a second issue. Is the Holy Spirit God?

## The Holy Spirit is God

Millard Erickson says that the deity of the Father is assumed; the deity of the Son is affirmed and argued; but the deity of the Spirit is inferred from indirect statements of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

How do we know that the Holy Spirit is God?

### Statements

The first indication is the names that are used in reference to the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> IBID. p. 847.

<sup>3</sup> p. 857.

## God

Acts 5:3-4 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the **Holy Spirit** and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? <sup>4</sup> While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to **God**."

Clearly, to lie to the Holy Spirit is identical to lying to God. How is this? Because the Holy Spirit is God.

We find this same interchange of the name Spirit with the name God in other passages.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are the **temple of God** and *that* the **Spirit of God** dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the **temple of the Holy Spirit** *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are **God's**.

## Lord

2 Corinthians 3:17 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> Now the **Lord is the Spirit**; and where the **Spirit of the Lord** *is*, there *is* liberty.

## Attributes

There are certain characteristics which only God possesses. The Holy Spirit is said to possess these same characteristics, therefore, He must be God.

## Omniscience

Isaiah 40:13-14 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> Who has directed the **Spirit of the LORD**, Or *as* His counselor has taught Him? <sup>14</sup> With whom did He take counsel, and *who* instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 (NKJV)

<sup>10</sup> But God has revealed *them* to us through His **Spirit**. For the **Spirit** searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so **no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**.

John 16:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and **He will tell you things to come**.

## Omnipresence

Psalms 139:7 (NKJV)

<sup>7</sup> **Where can I go from Your Spirit?** Or where can I flee from Your presence?

## *Omnipotence*

Romans 15:19 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup> in mighty signs and wonders, by the **power of the Spirit of God**, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

## *Creator*

Genesis 1:2 (NKJV)

<sup>2</sup> The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. **And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

Job 26:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> By **His Spirit He adorned the heavens**; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

Psalms 104:30 (NKJV)

<sup>30</sup> You send forth Your **Spirit**, they are **created**; And You renew the face of the earth.

## *Eternal*

Hebrews 9:14 (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the **eternal Spirit** offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

## *Truth*

John 16:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> However, when He, the **Spirit of truth**, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

## *Salvation*

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin:

John 16:8-11 (NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> of sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; <sup>11</sup> of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The Holy Spirit regenerates to salvation:

John 3:5-8 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the **Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the **Spirit** is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is **born of the Spirit.**"

Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the **washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**,

The Holy Spirit baptises:

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup>For by one **Spirit** we were all **baptized** into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

The Holy Spirit seals believers:

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup>In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were **sealed with the Holy Spirit** of promise, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

The Holy Spirit raises the dead:

Romans 8:11 (NKJV)

<sup>11</sup>But if the **Spirit** of Him who **raised Jesus from the dead** dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit** who dwells in you.

### *Inspires Scripture*

2 Peter 1:21 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup>for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the **Holy Spirit**.

Since the Holy Spirit is entitled to the names of God and exercises the attributes of God, we can be sure He is indeed God.

This has a few implications for our own relationship to God.

1. Because the Holy Spirit is a person, we should relate to Him – seeking His control, His guidance and His enablement.
2. Because the Holy Spirit is God, it is appropriate for us to worship, honour and respect Him just as we do the Father and the Son.
3. Because the Holy Spirit indwells us, God could not be any closer to us than He is.