

The Mystery of the Spirit

The Work of the Spirit in the Gospels

Lecture 4

One of the mysteries of the Trinity is how the three persons interact with each other. While the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, it is also true that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. But, and this is where it exceeds our ability to understand, the Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Spirit; and the Spirit is not the Father.

One God; three distinct persons.

All attempts to illustrate this fall short. For example, some say that the Trinity is like an apple – three distinct parts (seeds, skin and flesh), but one apple. Others compare the Trinity to an egg – yoke, white and shell, but one egg. But both of these illustrations are inadequate because the yoke is not the egg, nor is the seed the apple. These are merely part of the egg or the apple – but the Holy Spirit is not part of God; He is God.

As distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have unique roles. Thus Jesus attributes His works to the Father even though Jesus was fully capable of doing those works Himself.

John 14:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the **Father** who dwells in Me **does the works**.

Elsewhere, the works of Jesus are credited to the Holy Spirit. Thus, the incarnation is inseparable from the Trinity – the three persons are distinct, yet intertwined from the birth of Jesus through the resurrection of Jesus.

If all of this seems a bit too much to grasp, then you have listened well. It is indeed beyond our ability to comprehend – and that is good. Because if God truly is as magnificent – or to use the theological term, transcendent – as the Bible says He is, then it is reasonable to expect that some things about Him would be more than we could take in.

At this point, I want to show you a short video called “The Parable of the Ant” that might help us accept the incomprehensible Trinity a bit easier.

Igniter Media: Parable of the Ant

Now let’s consider the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of Jesus.

His Work in Jesus

The Holy Spirit features prominently in the life and ministry of Jesus. From conception to resurrection, the Holy Spirit was present.

Conception

Luke 1:35 (NKJV)

³⁵And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the power of

the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Matthew 1:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is **conceived** in her is of the **Holy Spirit**.

This is a mystery – but a necessary one. How could God become man without ceasing to be God? Also, how could God be born of a woman without inheriting a sin nature? The answer is that God performed a miracle. Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, and then carried the God-man Jesus for the normal nine months until birth.

Conception by the Holy Spirit is the explanation for Jesus being fully man without diminishing His pre-incarnate deity, and for the avoidance of a sin nature.

Ministry

The earthly ministry of Jesus was inaugurated at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon Him. This was the anointing of Jesus for ministry.

Matthew 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

Interestingly, the first place the Spirit directed Jesus to go was into isolation. While fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Devil tempted Jesus. This was the plan of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 4:1 (NKJV)

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the **Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Luke 4:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Then Jesus returned in the **power of the Spirit** to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.

The healings and miracles that Jesus performed – and the authoritative teachings that He spoke – were done with the assistance of the Spirit. While it is true that Jesus, being God, could have done all of this without assistance, He nevertheless limited His own ability in dependence on the Spirit – just as we must do of necessity (since we are not God).

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of taking assistance from the Devil, Jesus warned them of the seriousness of blaspheming the Holy Spirit – who was actually the explanation for His miracles.

Matthew 12:25-32 (NKJV)

²⁵ But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

²⁸ But if I cast out demons by the **Spirit of God**, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰ He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. ³¹ "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the **Holy Spirit**, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

Resurrection

Just as the Spirit is the breath of life, He is the breath of resurrected life. It was by the Spirit that Jesus was raised . . . and by the Spirit that believers will be raised as well.

1 Peter 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but **made alive** by the **Spirit**,

Romans 8:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ 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.

This is dramatically illustrated by a vision that Ezekiel had.

Ezekiel 37:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'

¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.

¹⁴ I will put My **Spirit** in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says the LORD.' "

Metaphors for the Spirit

Earlier I said that the egg and the apple were not suitable metaphors for the Trinity. Nevertheless, the Bible itself uses metaphors for the Spirit – which is good, because more than the Father (whose role we can picture) and the Son (who became flesh and dwelt among us), the Spirit cannot be visualised.

What is the Spirit like? The Spirit is like:

Water

John 7:38-39 (NKJV)

³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of **living water**." ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the **Spirit**, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the **Holy Spirit** was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Water is useful for various purposes . . . metaphorically speaking:

Cleansing

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NKJV)

²⁵ Then I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you shall be clean; I will **cleanse you** from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a **new spirit** within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

True cleansing is not merely a matter of rinsing off the dirt. It is a matter of changing the nature of the person. If you rinse off a pig, you are wasting your time. As long as he remains a pig, he will wallow in the mud. Cleansing must include transformation, so that a pig ceases to be a pig.

The Spirit, then, not only rinses us of sin, but also enables us to live according to a new nature that is inclined towards walking in God's statutes.

Another function of water is . . .

Nourishing

Isaiah 44:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For I will pour **water on him who is thirsty**, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour **My Spirit** on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring; ⁴ They will spring up among the grass Like willows by the watercourses.'

A lifeless, sin-enslaved soul is always dry and barren. But like a cool glass of water on a hot day is the Spirit – He refreshes and nourishes the recipient so that he becomes as attractive and healthy as well-watered grass.

I have a neighbour whose lawn looks like a carpet. It is thick and green. The secret is on the sign in front of the property: "bore water used".

Perhaps we should wear a sign to explain the effects of the Spirit – that is assuming people would be curious because we are in fact noticeably different to the norm.

Freely Given

Revelation 22:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And the **Spirit** and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the **water of life freely**.

This is the best news. The Spirit is given freely to anyone who seeks Him.

Water is one metaphor for the Spirit – a Spirit who cleanses and nourishes.

Fire

Isaiah 4:4 (NKJV)

⁴ When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the **spirit of burning**,

Nothing purifies more efficiently than fire. This is the action of the Holy Spirit – burning away the impurities in our souls.

There is a second way that fire is useful – as light in a lamp. In this capacity, the Spirit illuminates the Word of God to the world.

1 Corinthians 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But God has **revealed** *them* to us through His **Spirit**. For the **Spirit** searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Like a torch in a dark room, the Holy Spirit makes hidden meanings clear.

A third metaphor is . . .

Wind

John 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸ 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**.”

The wind cannot be seen . . . but its effects are quite visible. The wind also cannot be controlled. When it blows, where it blows and how hard it blows appear arbitrary from a human viewpoint.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ But one and the same **Spirit** works all these things, **distributing to each one individually** as He wills.

This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost, when the church was started.

Acts 2:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a **sound from heaven**, as of a **rushing mighty wind**, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the **Spirit** gave them utterance.

The Spirit, like a breath of wind, will also be responsible for restoring Israel to its intended life and glory. This will occur in the end times.

A passage from Ezekiel that we read earlier speaks of this. We now add two verses to what we looked at before.

Ezekiel 37:9-14 (NKJV)

⁹ Also He said to me, “Prophesy to the **breath**, prophesy, son of man, and say to the **breath**, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Come from the **four winds**, O **breath**, and **breathe on these slain**, that they may live.” ’ ” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and **breath** came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. . . . ¹⁴ I will put **My Spirit** in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*,” says the LORD.’ ”

Oil

Isaiah 61:1 (NKJV)

¹ “The **Spirit** of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has **anointed** Me To preach good tidings

to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*;

Oil was the emblem of anointing – for kings and prophets and priests. The Holy Spirit was this to Jesus. At the inauguration of His earthly ministry, Jesus quoted this passage from Isaiah and declared it fulfilled.

Believers are also anointed with the oil of the Spirit. This enables us to know God and to discern error. John MacArthur calls this a “built in lie detector”.

1 John 2:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ But you have an **anointing** from the **Holy One**, and you know all things.

1 John 2:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ But the **anointing** which you have received from Him **abides in you**, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same **anointing** teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

The unique property of the Holy Spirit as oil is that He does not run off as oil would normally do, but He indwells the person permanently. Rather than a once-off honour – like being sworn in as Prime Minister by the Governor-General, the Holy Spirit remains as a constant emblem of being chosen by God.

A Dove

Matthew 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a **dove** and alighting upon Him.

A Voice

The Holy Spirit is responsible to reveal the Father and the Son. He does this through the Scripture He has inspired. He also does it through the testimony of those He indwells.

Matthew 10:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the **Spirit** of your Father who **speaks** in you.

The context of this verse is the daunting prospect of a believer being put on trial before kings and governors. What should be said? Jesus said, “Don’t worry, the Holy Spirit will give you the words you need.”

Not only does the Holy Spirit speak through us, He also speaks to us.

John 16:13 (NKJV)

¹³ 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**.

By giving us understanding of the Bible, the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the future.

Hebrews 3:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷Therefore, as the **Holy Spirit says**: “*Today, if you will hear His voice,* ⁸ *Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness,*

This is a quotation from Scripture (Psalm 95), yet it is attributed to the Holy Spirit’s voice, making it an example of inspiration.

A Seal

In biblical times, a seal was both a mark of ownership and an assurance. In this same respect, the Holy Spirit is called a seal.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ 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, ¹⁴ who is the **guarantee** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 4:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ And do not grieve the **Holy Spirit** of God, by whom you were **sealed for the day of redemption**.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us *is* God, ²² who also has **sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee**.

Application

What do we make of the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus as recorded in the gospels? What does this have to do with the metaphors used of the Spirit – water, fire, wind, oil, dove and voice?

We make of this both an honour and an encouragement. The honour is that God would bestow this privilege on us – to be indwelt by God Himself.

The encouragement is that Jesus, by limiting His ministry skills to the enabling of the Spirit, took no advantage over us. The same Spirit enables our ministry. No wonder Jesus said that greater works than His were yet to come.

We, therefore, should serve God with humility – as ones who are unworthy – and with expectancy – as ones who believe God lives and is here.