

BACK TO BIBLE STUDY

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Objective: Who or what is the Holy Spirit, and why is this relevant to the believer?

The Holy Spirit - functionality or personality?

The Holy Spirit is often described in terms of functionality, such as God's power or presence or action or voice. Is this an adequate way in which to portray the Spirit?

Jesus also is described as the power of God (Philippians 4:13), the presence of God (Galatians 2:20), the action of God (John 5:19), and the voice of God (3:34). Yet we speak of Jesus in terms of personhood.

Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as also having attributes of personhood, thus raising the Spirit's profile above mere functionality.

The Holy Spirit has a will (I Corinthians 12:11 - "one and the same Spirit ... distributing to each one individually as He wills"). The Holy Spirit searches, knows, teaches, and compares (2:10-13).

The Holy Spirit has emotions. The Spirit of Grace can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29), and can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit comforts, and is called a helper, just like Jesus (John 14:16). In other passages of Scripture the Spirit speaks, commands, testifies, is lied to, intercedes, strives, etc. All these are terms consistent with personhood.

Biblically speaking, the Spirit is not a what, but a who. The Spirit is "someone", not something.

In most Christian circles the Holy Spirit is referred to as "He", which is not meant to be a gender reference: rather "He" is used to denote the personhood of the Spirit.

The divinity of the Spirit

The Bible ascribes divine qualities to the Holy Spirit. He is not described as having angelic or human nature.

Job 33:4 notes, "The Spirit of God has made me". The Holy Spirit creates. The Spirit is eternal (Hebrews 9:14). He is omnipresent (Psalm 139:7).

Search the Scriptures and you will see that the Spirit is all powerful, all knowing, life giving. All these are attributes of the divine nature.

Thus the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as divine.

Reflection

What is the spiritual effect of seeing the Spirit solely as a function?

Describe how the Spirit is divine.

God is One

A fundamental teaching of the NT is that there is one God (1 Corinthians 8:6; Romans 3:29-30; 1 Timothy 2:5; Galatians 3:20). Jesus indicated that He and the Father shared the same Godhead (John 10:30).

If the Holy Spirit is a divine "someone", is He a separate God? The answer must be no. If He were, then God would not be one.

Scripture alludes to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in phrases that have equal weight in sentence construction.

Matthew 28:19 reads, "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". The three phrases are distinct and have the same linguistic value. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul prays that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all". Peter explains that Christians are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:2).

Thus Matthew, Paul and Peter observe clearly the distinctions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Paul told the Corinthian converts that the true Godhead is not a collection of gods (like the Greek pantheon) who each give different gifts. God is one, and it is "the same Spirit...the same Lord...the same God who works all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Later, Paul expounded more about the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are not two separate entities, he says, in fact "the Lord" (Jesus) "is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Jesus said that God the Father would send the Spirit of truth so that He, the Father, could dwell in the believer (John 14:16-17). The Spirit points to Jesus and reminds believers of His words (14:26), and is sent by the Son from the Father to testify of the salvation that Jesus makes possible (15:26).

Just as the Father and the Son are one, so are the Son and the Spirit. And by sending the Spirit the Father dwells in us.

The Trinity

After the death of the NT apostles, discussions arose within the church as to

how the Godhead could be understood. The challenge was to preserve the oneness of God. Various explanations suggested concepts of bi-theism (two gods – Father and Son but the Spirit only a function of each or both) and tri-theism (three Gods – Father, Son and Spirit), but this went against the basic monotheism found in both the New and Old Testaments (Malachi 2:10, etc).

The Trinity, an expression not found in the Bible, is a model devised by early theologians for describing how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate within the oneness of the Godhead. It was the Christian defense against tri-theistic and bi-theistic heresies, and combated pagan polytheism.

Metaphors cannot fully describe God as God is, but they can help us grasp an idea such as the Trinity. One metaphor is to suggest that a human being is three things at once. Just as a human is soul (heart, seat of emotions), body, and spirit (mind), so God is the compassionate Father, the Son (the Godhead bodily – see Colossians 2:9), and the Holy Spirit (who alone understands the things that pertain to God – see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

Biblical references already used in this study teach the truth that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are distinct Persons within the one Being of God.

The NIV translation of Isaiah 9:6 points to a Trinitarian thought. The child to be born will be called "Wonderful Counsellor" (the Holy Spirit), "Mighty God" (the Godhead), "Almighty Father" (God the Father), and the "Prince of Peace" (God the Son).

Reflection

What is the significance of understanding that God is One?

Can you think of a model that helps explain the Trinity?

Issues

The Trinity has been hotly debated by opposing theological traditions. For example, the Western view is more hierarchical and static, whereas the Eastern view is that there is always movement in the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Theologians talk of the social and the economic Trinity and of other ideas. However, any theory that implies that the Father and the Son and the Spirit have separate wills or desires or existences must be regarded as untrue (and therefore heretical) because God is one. There is perfect and dynamic love, joy, harmony and absolute oneness in the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit to each other.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a model for understanding the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Of course, we don't worship doctrines or models. We worship the Father "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Theologies that suggest that the Spirit should receive His fair share of praise are suspect because the Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, but glorifies Christ (John 16:13).

Prayer in the New Testament is made primarily to God the Father. Scripture does not demand that we should pray to the Spirit. When we pray to the Father we are praying to the triune Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The distinctions in the Godhead are not three gods, each requiring separate prayerful attention.

Also, praying or baptizing in the name of Jesus is the same as doing so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism of the Holy Spirit cannot be different from or superior to the baptism of Christ because the Father, the Lord Jesus and the Spirit are one.

Reflection

In what ways does preserving the oneness of God protect from heresy?

Receive the Spirit

The Spirit is received in faith by whoever repents and is baptised in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38-39; Galatians 3:14).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, who testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:14-16), and we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our (spiritual) inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14).

If we have the Spirit, then we belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). The Christian church is likened to the temple of God because the Spirit dwells in believers (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ who motivated the OT prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12), purifies the Christian's soul in obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22), empowers for salvation (Luke 24:49), sanctifies (1 Corinthians 6:11), produces godly fruit (Galatians 5:22-25), and equips for the furtherance of the Gospel and the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 14:12; Ephesians 4:7-16; Romans 12:4-8).

The Holy Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13), and convicts "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (16:8).

Conclusion

The central biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually shapes our faith and our lives as Christians. The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Savior Jesus places us through His life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh.

From before all time the Triune God determined to bring humanity into the indescribable life and fellowship and joy that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together as the one true God. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, we have been made right with the Father, and in Jesus we are included in the fellowship and joy of the shared life of the Trinity.

Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension are living proof of the total and unwavering devotion of the Father to His loving purpose of including humanity in the joy and fellowship of the life of the Trinity. Jesus is the proof that the Father will never abandon us. In Jesus, the Father has adopted us and made us His beloved children, and He will never forsake his plans for us.

When we trust Jesus to be our all in all, it is not an empty trust. He *is* our all in all. In Him, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are made new, and we are included in the life He shares with the Father and the Spirit.

God's eternal and almighty word of love and inclusion for you will never be silenced. The Holy Spirit is the absolute seal of truth, the eternal Witness and Advocate that in Christ you belong to the Father, and nothing in heaven or earth can ever change that.

Reflection

What does the Holy Spirit do for you personally?

From the Statement of Beliefs of the Grace Communion International/ Worldwide Church of God UK:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/default.htm#Spirit>

The Holy Spirit

"The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune God, eternally proceeding from the Father through the Son. He is the Comforter promised by Jesus Christ, who unites us with the Father and the Son, and transforms us into the image of Christ. The Spirit works out in us the regeneration Christ accomplished for us, and by continual renewal empowers us to share in the Son's glorious and eternal communion with the Father as his children. The Holy Spirit is the Source of inspiration and prophecy throughout the Scriptures, and the Source of unity and communion in the church. He provides spiritual gifts for the work of the gospel, and is the Christian's constant Guide into all truth."

(Matthew 28:19; John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 2:38; John 14:17, 26; 1 Peter 1:2; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 16:13)

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/default.htm#God>

The Triune God

"God, by the testimony of Scripture, is one divine Being in three eternal, co-essential, yet distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The One God may be known only in the Three and the Three may be known only as the one true God, good, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, and immutable in his covenant love for humanity. He is Creator of heaven and earth, Sustainer of the universe, and Author of human salvation. Though transcendent, God freely and in divine love,

grace and goodness involves himself with humanity directly and personally in Jesus Christ, that humanity, by the Spirit, might share in his eternal life as his children."

(Mark 12:29; Matthew 28:19; John 14:9; 1 John 4:8; Romans 5:8; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:2; Galatians 3:26)

Next Study

What is sin, and why should the believer avoid it?