

**Core Seminar**

**Systematic Theology-Part 1**

**Session 7: The Person of the Holy Spirit**

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1. **Introduction**

Today, we’re considering the Person of the Holy Spirit; thinking carefully about what the Bible reveals about Him. Why is this important?

Imagine this: Tomorrow, I find my affections incredibly stirred for my wife. I’ve been thinking about her at work and can’t get her off my mind. So moved, when I go home, I’m looking for some way to communicate how I feel and get on knees, look at her in the eyes, heart hurting from longing for her and I tell her, “Honey, I’m crazy about you; you’re irresistible; I don’t know *what* it is today, maybe your long flowing black hair or stunning green eyes; but you leave me breathless.” Some of you may think that’s sweet, but the problem is my wife has blonde hair…she has blue eyes. So it may sound sweet, but that’s going to go bad for me - I’m in trouble.

How we see God is important, because if we aren’t seeing Him as He’s revealed Himself in Scripture, we aren’t worshipping God, but rather a *false* God.

**II. The Person of the Holy Spirit**

Christians worship one God; we are *monotheistic.* We worship one God, yet Scripture clearly depicts three persons of the godhead. Thinking of God the Father and God the Son makes more immediate sense to us in that there is a relational component that we are immediately familiar with: that of a father or son. But what are we to do with God the *Spirit.* It’s tempting to think of the 3rd person of the Trinity as cold or distant. But when we listen to the Bible, we see something different.

What do we mean when we talk about the Holy Spirit as a Person? We do not mean that the Holy Spirit is a human person that we just cannot see. The only person of the Godhead taking humanity upon Himself is Christ. What we do mean is that the Holy Spirit has personal subsistence. He is an intelligent, voluntary, living being, with understanding and will.

While being one with the Father and the Son, there is a distinction made between the three. For example, Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:27), and this naturally indicates a distinction between the Holy Spirit and God the Father to whom the intercession is made.

This is different from a false view of God that is called “modalism.” Modalism claims that God is not really three distinct persons, but only one person who appears to people in three different modes at different times. So for example, in the Old Testament God appeared as the Father, in the Gospels God appeared as the Son, and after Pentecost God appeared as the Spirit. This view does what so many other false views do by trying to make the mystery of the Trinity completely understandable. Yet, this view falls short due to all of the examples where we see the members of the Trinity interacting with each other. Was Jesus’ praying to the Father merely a charade? How could the Spirit descend on the Son when he was baptized?

In the early church, some denied that the Spirit was a separate personal entity. Instead, they said that the Spirit was more like an “essence” or an influence or energy from God the Father. His place in the Trinity has been questioned in light of these ideas, so it is important to establish the Spirit’s “personality” – His defined separate identity.

There are three Biblical reasons to conclude the Holy Spirit is a person, just as God the Father is a person, and just as the Lord Jesus Christ is a person:

**1. Personal pronouns**

The first reason to conclude the Holy Spirit is a person is that personal pronouns are used of Him and that he makes statements in the first person. Consider Acts 10:19-20; “**While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for *I* have sent them**.”

When Jesus and the Apostles speak of the Holy Spirit they always use personal pronouns: He, Him, Himself. This also testifies to the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

**2. Personal Properties**

The second reason to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person is from the personal properties that are ascribed to Him, such as understanding or wisdom, will, and power. The operation of His will, for example, is seen in I Corinthians 12:11 – “**All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines**.” In John 14, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Not merely Comfort but the Comfort*er*. The Holy Spirit has these personal characteristics, and is involved in personal activities. The Holy Spirit reveals, teaches, comforts, counsels, helps, and loves. He can be grieved, lied to and blasphemed.

In all of these things we see the clear personality, or distinct identity, of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Sound exegesis requires that the Holy Spirit be regarded as a person and not as a power or force.

Why does this matter? Because far from being cold or distant; far from being just a force or energy, the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person means we can have a relationship with Him! We’ll talk more about this in the next few weeks when we discuss the *work* of the Holy Spirit, but as we are led by Him, loved by, purified by, indwelt by Him, all that happens in the context of a *relationship*.

**III. The Holy Spirit is God**

Scripture also teaches that the Holy Spirit is fully God.

**1. Scripture identifies Him as God**

Acts 5:1-4 says, “**Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have *lied to the Holy Spirit* and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? *You have not lied to men but to God***.””

Here we see that according to Peter, when Ananias “lied to the “Holy Spirit,” he was in fact “lying to God.” If lying to the Spirit is synonymous with lying to God, then the Spirit must be God.

**2. The Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes**

If we’re to say that the Holy Spirit is fully God, then we should presume that he would possess divine attributes, and we do. Throughout Scripture we see that…

* + - * The Holy Spirit is ***eternal***. Hebrews 9:14 says, “**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death**….”
			* The Holy Spirit is ***omnipresent*** *– everywhere at once*. Psalm 139:7-10 says, “**Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depth, you are there**.”
			* The Holy Spirit is ***omniscient*** *– all knowing*. I Corinthians 2:10-11 says, “**The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God**.”

As God, the Holy Spirit is transcendent. That’s part of the reason He’s called the *Holy* Spirit – to be holy is to be set apart. And yet, this God is personal and thus has the potential for relationship. Sometimes it’s easy to gloss over things like this and miss their significance – so think of it. Because He is divine, He has divine resources, divine knowledge, divine presence; to know Him is to know the God who satisfies and who supplies all our needs. *Do you need wisdom*? You can know the one who is omniscient. *Are you lost or lonely?* There is one who no matter where you go, is there. *Are you feeling weak?* You can know the one whose power is limitless; who renews our strength.

The Holy Spirit’s being both a person and God are essential here. In the coming weeks, we will explore the *work* of the Spirit together, but without this foundation of who He *is,* those things would matter very little.

**Questions or Comments?**

**5. Though distinguished from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is represented as equal with the Father and the Son in the great Trinitarian passages of the New Testament**

 “Trinity” is a term that the church developed to summarize a doctrine that is given to us in fragments. It‘s a helpful word that seeks to combine and convey all that Scripture speaks regarding the relationship of the Godhead. The doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of several biblical concepts that are indisputable from the text of Scripture. Namely that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each distinct persons, and that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each fully God.



So in answer to Muslims and other monotheistic religions, Christianity clearly affirms that there is only one God, but this one God exists in three Persons. Is that reasonable? In one sense “yes” and one sense “no.”

“Yes,” because nothing in Trinitarian doctrine is unreasonable or irrational. There is nothing inherently contradictory about the position despite its mysteriousness. We’re not saying there are three Gods, but that there is one God in three persons.

“No,” though, because “the doctrine of the Trinity is indiscoverable by reason, so it is incapable of proof from reason. There are no analogies to it in Nature, not even in the spiritual nature of man, who is made in the image of God.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Let’s take a look now at some of the key Trinitarian passages in the New Testament:

* + - * Matt 3:16 – **As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**

The three persons of the Godhead are seen clearly in this passage functioning in their distinct roles. God the Father is speaking from heaven, God the Son is being baptized to fulfill the Father’s will, and God the Spirit is seen descending from heaven upon the Son empowering his ministry. We see that whatever the Father does in dealing with man, He generally does through the Son by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18).

* + - * Matt 28:19 – Jesus says, “**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**.”

Notice that Jesus does not instruct his disciples, to baptize new believers in the “names” of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, as if we were dealing with three different beings, but in the “name,” which is singular. Jesus, like he did so many other times in his ministry, teaches that He and the Father are one, and here He includes the Holy Spirit in that unity of essence. The statement asserts the “unity of the three Persons of the Trinity by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then [emphasizes] the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit.’”[[2]](#footnote-2)

“The Holy Spirit, then is fully God. He is not one-third God, but fully God. Yet, it is not the Spirit alone who is fully God, but he eternally exists along with the Father and the Son, each of whom also possesses fully the identically same, undivided, divine nature...What distinguishes the Spirit from the Father and the Son is not the divine nature…what distinguishes the Spirit is his particularly *role* as the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and to the Son and the *relationships* that he has with each of them.[[3]](#footnote-3)”

**Conclusion**

The night before His crucifixion, what does Jesus teach his disciples? What does he see as important for them to know? In John 14-16 He teaches them on who the Holy Spirit is. And notice what he says to them in **John 16:7, “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.”**

Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples for a moment. You’ve ate, walked with, ministered with, listened to, gotten to know Jesus over the last several years. They’ve given their lives to Him – that time must’ve been amazing. And yet, Jesus says its better (“to your advantage”) that He go away *so* that the Holy Spirit would come to them. I don’t know about you, but it wouldn’t immediately be obvious why that is better. How can that be?

Look back to **John 15:26–27.** Again, Jesus speaks of the Helper, the Holy Spirit saying, **“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. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”**

There’s a bit of a double entendre or double meaning here between the disciples and the Spirit. Just as the disciples will bear witness about Jesus, so too will the Helper, the Holy Spirit. What’s the qualification for the disciples’ being a witness? V27: “*because* you have been with me from the beginning.” If that’s true of the disciples, how much more of the Holy Spirit. As the early church Father, Basil of Caesarea, put it, the Holy Spirit was Christ’s ‘*inseparable companion…all the activity of Christ was unfolded in the presence of the Holy Spirit.”*

In eternity past, the Spirit and the Son were in perfect fellowship. When Jesus was conceived in the Virgin Mary, it was by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35). In Jesus’ baptism, temptations, and ministry of miracles and teaching, the Spirit was there leading (Lk. 4:1), empowering (Mt. 12:28) and making Him known. In Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, the Spirit was there (Heb. 9:14, Rom. 6:4).

Here’s the point. As the one who has been Jesus’ constant companion, He is the perfect candidate to bear witness too, to make known Christ. That’s precisely what He does, and that’s part of why Jesus can say it’s better that he leave so the Holy Spirit can come. To have the Spirit is to have the Spirit of Christ; to have the Spirit is to have Christ. No longer limited by space and time, the Holy Spirit manifests the presence of Jesus[[4]](#footnote-4) to us.

In Jesus’ high priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus notes in **v24, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”** So, Jesus gives us a sneak peek into eternity past in the perfect, abiding, joy-filled loving relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amazingly, in the verse before, Jesus had testified that God would love Jesus’ followers “even as” the Father loved him! Amazing!

Do you find that difficult to grasp? Difficult to believe and live in light of? I think in some measure, we all do.

But this is one of the precious ministries of the Spirit. In **Romans 8:15–16** Paul says this of the believer, **“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”** The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption. Which means one of his jobs is to make us conscience that we *are* sons and daughters. To help us to better know that the love with which God loves us.

May we come to better know that today and in the coming weeks as we consider together the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

**Questions or Comments?**

**PRAYER**

“The Holy Spirit embraces eternally the backstage position in relation to the Father and the Son…In creation, redemption and consummation, he willingly accepts the role of supporter, helper, sustainer and equipper, and in all these respects he forsakes the spotlight.” (Bruce Ware as quoted in *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*)

1. “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” by B.B. Warfield. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Id. at 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ware, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Keep in Step with the Spirit* by Packer, pg. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)