

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The question is not “*What is the Holy Spirit?*” Rather, the question is “*Who is the Holy Spirit?*” This is the question because the Holy Spirit is a being, an individual with personality, the third member of the Godhead. He is more than a force or a power; He is a living heavenly person.

HE IS LIKE A PERSON

All information available in the Bible points to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a divine person. He has the same personal traits as do the Father and the Son.

He Has the Attributes of a Person

The attributes of the Holy Spirit indicate that He is a living person, an individual, instead of just a force:

1. *He has judgment:* “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 15:28a).
2. *He has a mind:* “And He who searches the

hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is" (Romans 8:27a).

3. *He wills*: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

4. *He has knowledge*: "Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11b).

5. *He has emotions* (love, grief, joy): "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30); "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30); "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

The fact that the Holy Spirit possesses these traits reveals that He is a person.

He Performs the Activities of a Person

The Holy Spirit acts as a person and not merely a force. He can do the following:

1. *He can teach and remind*: "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 said to you" (John 14:26).

2. *He bears witness*: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26).

3. *He guides into truth*: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth"

(John 16:13a).

4. *He speaks*: “For He will not speak on His own initiative” (John 16:13b; see also Acts 8:29; 11:12; 1 Timothy 4:1).

5. *He hears*: “But whatever He hears, He will speak” (John 16:13c).

6. *He discloses*: “And He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13d).

7. *He forbids*: “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6).

8. *He gives life*: “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11b).

9. *He reveals*: “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:10a; see also Ephesians 3:3–5).

10. *He searches*: “For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10b).

11. *He promises*: “In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14; see Acts 2:33).

12. *He fellowships*: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14; see also Philippians 2:1).

13. *He intercedes*: “. . . but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; . . . He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26, 27).

14. *He indicates and predicts*: “. . . the Spirit of

Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Peter 1:11).

15. *He invites*: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'" (Revelation 22:17a).

16. *He leads*: "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1); "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

A person can engage in each of these activities, while a mere force cannot. Therefore, the Holy Spirit should be seen as a person.

He Can Be Mistreated

The words used to describe the slights and injuries done to the Holy Spirit are usually terms associated with the mistreatment of a person instead of wrongs committed against a non-living power or force. He can be mistreated in these ways:

1. *He can be blasphemed*: ". . . but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. . . . whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31, 32).

2. *He can be lied to*: "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . ?'" (Acts 5:3a).

3. *He can be resisted*: "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51a).

4. *He can be grieved*: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

5. *He can be insulted or despised:* “. . . and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29).

6. *He can be quenched:* “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The statements made concerning how the Holy Spirit can be mistreated indicate that He is a person. Ill treatment of powers or forces are usually not described in the above manner, except in a poetic or figurative context. The contexts of these verses do not indicate that the language is figurative.

He Has a Separate Existence

Another indication that the Holy Spirit is a person is that He is not only mentioned along with the Father and the Son as having their nature and character, but He also has His own distinct and separate existence.

He is mentioned as descending on Jesus when He was baptized (John 1:33). When the Son came out of the water of baptism, the Spirit descended on Him and the Father spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16, 17; Luke 3:21, 22). The Father remained in heaven, the Son remained on earth, and the Spirit came to dwell with Jesus.

A person can speak evil against Jesus and be forgiven—but if he speaks against the Holy Spirit, he cannot be forgiven (Matthew 12:32). How can one speak against Jesus and not against the Holy Spirit if they are the same person? In giving this teaching, Jesus must have realized their separate-ness.

Luke 4:1 says that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, just as others were said to be full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24). Surely, all will agree

that the people who were full of the Holy Spirit in these cases in Acts were not the same person as the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit also must be recognized as distinctly separate beings.

John wrote that the Holy Spirit was not yet given (John 7:39), for Jesus was not glorified. This was stated while Jesus was already on earth with the apostles. The Holy Spirit must be someone other than Jesus if the Holy Spirit had not yet been given.

In John 14:26 Jesus stated that He would send the apostles "another Helper," which (according to John 14:16) was to be the Holy Spirit. How could Jesus send them "another" Helper if He was the Helper? Likewise, how could the Holy Spirit be "another" Helper if He and Jesus are the same?

Jesus said He would not send the Spirit until He had gone away (John 16:7). He also said that the Spirit would not speak on His own initiative, but would speak what He heard from Jesus (John 16:13). The information given in the New Testament about Jesus and the Holy Spirit indicates that they are two independent, separate heavenly persons.

HE IS DIVINE

The Holy Spirit is mentioned along with the Father and the Son, as their equal, having the same status. People are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Paul mentioned the three together, as having the same status, in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." The Spirit, God ("the Father"; 1 Corinthians 8:6), and the Lord ("Jesus"; 1 Corinthians 8:6) are the Ones

who administer the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4–6) which are said to be given according to the will of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11).¹

The evidence in the New Testament clearly and powerfully shows that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct, individual heavenly beings of like nature. They are joined together as one in their relationship with each other and in their service to mankind.

Qualities possessed only by God are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Note five attributes which He shares with the Father and the Son:

1. *He is eternal*: The following are Bible state-

¹Miraculous gifts have ceased to exist. We can be confident of this because of the clear statement of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. In three chapters of 1 Corinthians we find Paul's discussion of miraculous gifts (12–14). In the middle of this discussion, he declared that love is more important than any miraculous gift (13:1–3). Then he described love (13:4–7). In the final section of the chapter (13:8–13), he showed that love, as a greater gift, would outlast the spiritual gifts. Paul was saying, "Prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, and the [miraculous] knowledge will be done away." These gifts caused Paul to say that "we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (vv. 9, 10). These miraculous gifts were to cease when "the perfect comes."

Since "perfect" means "complete," it stands in contrast with that which is "in part." The "partial" is miraculous knowledge and prophecy, which revealed the Word of God orally. It is most natural, then, to realize that the complete or "perfect" is the full revelation given to man in the written record of the New Testament. This complete revelation of God's will, "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3), came into general possession around the end of the first century. When the "complete" came, the "partial" was done away. Since the New Testament records the complete will of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:3), miraculous gifts are no longer needed to provide further revelation. (Phil Sanders, "Does Anyone Have Miraculous Gifts Today?" *Truth for Today* [April 1995]: 49.)

ments concerning the eternal nature of (1) the Holy Spirit—“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14); (2) the Father—“Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting” (Psalm 93:2); and (3) Jesus—“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8); “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Peter 1:11).

2. *He is all-knowing*: This knowledge is spoken of in Bible passages concerning (1) the Holy Spirit—“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10); (2) the Father—“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13); and (3) Jesus—“But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24, 25).

3. *He is all-powerful*: Several Bible passages mention this power over everything in relation to (1) the Holy Spirit—“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35b); “And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14a); “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a); (2) God—“For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37); and (3) Jesus—

“... ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’” (Matthew 28:18).

4. *He is present everywhere*: The ability to be everywhere belongs to (1) the Holy Spirit—“Where can I go from Your Spirit?” (Psalm 139:7a); (2) the Father—“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You” (1 Kings 8:27a); “‘Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?’ declares the Lord. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’...” (Jeremiah 23:24); and (3) Jesus—“I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b).

5. *He has creative power*: These Bible passages portray each member of the Godhead as Creator: (1) The Holy Spirit—“. . . the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2); (2) the Father—“It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens” (Jeremiah 51:15); and (3) the Son—“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is described in terms that can apply only to God. From these terms we can draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit shares the divine nature with the Father and the Son and is one with the Father and the Son, but that He is a distinct personality. He is an important, central person of the Bible.

STUDY QUESTIONS

(answers on page 262)

1. Explain why the question should be “Who is the Holy Spirit?” rather than “What is the Holy Spirit?”
2. What five attributes indicate that the Holy Spirit is a living “person”?
3. How does the fact that the Holy Spirit can be mistreated indicate that He is a person?
4. What qualities does the Holy Spirit share with the Father and the Son?

WORD HELPS

attributes—features or characteristics. Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

miraculous gifts—special God-given abilities—such as tongue-speaking, healings, and prophecy—given to the early church before the writing of the New Testament was completed. These gifts are no longer needed or available. (See Ephesians 4:5; Matthew 28:18–20.)

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIANS TODAY

1. He sets us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2–8).
2. He will bring about our resurrection (Romans 8:11).
3. He helps in our prayers (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18).
4. He intercedes in our behalf (Romans 8:26, 27).
5. He leads us (Romans 8:14).
6. He seals us as a pledge for the day of redemption (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30).
7. He has fellowship with us (2 Corinthians 13:14).
8. He gives us access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18).
9. He strengthens the inner person (Ephesians 3:16).
10. He brings unity (Ephesians 4:3).
11. He sanctifies us (2 Thessalonians 2:13).