

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

Lesson #4 for January 28, 2017

Scriptures: John 14:6; 16:13-14; 17:17; Romans 5:5; 8:14-16; 15:13.

1. What picture comes into your mind when the *Holy Spirit* is mentioned? Do you think of a Person? Or, some form of divine power, influence, or force—like wind, water, or fire? What do the Scriptures teach us about the characteristics of the Holy Spirit? Does the Holy Spirit have a personality? Or, is He—or It—just some expression describing a particular aspect of God the Father?
2. Read John 16:13-14; John 15:26-27; and John 14:17,26. Notice that the Holy Spirit comes to reveal the truth about God, both Father and Son. What are some of the characteristics of a person? What would distinguish a person from a force—such as wind, water, or fire—or a power? **People have the ability to think, to choose, to speak, and to express their choices.** In these verses we notice that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth: ¹³“When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come.¹⁴He will take what I [that is, Jesus] say and tell it to you.” (John 16:13-14, *GNB*) [Content in brackets is added.] In other words, He, the Holy Spirit, will reveal the truth about God and speak about Me [Jesus]. He will teach you everything, even things yet in the future, reminding you of all I have told you. [Personal paraphrase]
3. Does that sound more like an impersonal force like wind or fire? Or, more like the actions of an intelligent being? Jesus described the Holy Spirit as *another Comforter*. (John 14:16) The Greek word for *another* is *allos*, meaning another of the same kind. The Holy Spirit is to be just like Jesus in as many ways as possible except that He will not be limited to being only in one place as Jesus is now. In what sense is the Holy Spirit of the *same kind* as Jesus? The other word *Comforter*, describing the Holy Spirit, is *parakletos*. That person is someone who comes to the aid or assistance of someone who needs help. Jesus Himself is also called a *Parakletos*. (1 John 2:1)
4. Jesus described the work of the Holy Spirit as guiding, speaking, hearing, disclosing, and glorifying. (John 16:13-14) The Holy Spirit also teaches and reminds us. (John 14:26) He dwells in us; (John 14:17) He testifies; (John 15:24,26) and He convicts. (John 16:8) It is very difficult to think of all these behaviors which clearly describe the actions of an individual as merely referring to some force or power.
5. When Jesus was about to finish His work on this earth, He told His disciples that He was going to send another Helper, One similar to Himself; He would send One who would continue to do His work and would be His Representative, but more than that, One who would be able to be near them no matter where they traveled or worked.
6. Read John 14:16,26; 15:26; Acts 15:28; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and 1 Timothy 4:1. In these verses we have several descriptions of what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit will teach us everything and remind us of what Jesus has told us. **The Holy Spirit will reveal the truth about God. He will speak the truth about Jesus.** He cooperates with Christians in their work on this earth. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray in the most appropriate way before the Father. (Romans 8:26-27) More than that, the Holy Spirit gives gifts/talents to each person. He warns us about lying spirits and the teachings of demons that will come at the end of this world's history.

7. Consider some additional aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit. Read Romans 8:14-16,27; 15:30; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; and 28:25. The Holy Spirit guides us, God's children. Is God's Spirit just like our spirits? How would you explain Hebrews 4:12? What happens when the soul and the spirit are divided? How should we understand John 6:63 (GNB): "What gives life is God's Spirit; human power is of no use at all. The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit." The Holy Spirit encourages us to think of the Father as our Father, even as Daddy. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit knows the secrets of God; He searches out everything, even the hidden depths of God's purposes. The Holy Spirit gave specific directions to Philip to go to a certain carriage and speak to the man who was traveling back to Ethiopia. He told Peter to go with the people whom He had sent—even though they were Gentiles—in order to carry the gospel to Cornelius. Some years later when under arrest in Jerusalem, Paul quoted the Holy Spirit as speaking through the prophet Isaiah. Do these actions described in Scripture suggest an impersonal force—a mere wind or fire? Or, are they clearly descriptions of an Intelligent Being?
8. Read also Ephesians 4:30; Acts 5:3,9; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and Romans 15:30. Notice the distinctive characteristics of personality that are used in these verses to describe the Holy Spirit. He has understanding; He has feelings; and He makes choices. He has a will. Only a Personal Being could be grieved. Personal Beings can be deceived and lied to. Personal Beings have the ability to think and choose and the capacity to love. Thus, we are saying the Holy Spirit is self-conscious, self-knowing, self-willing, and self-determining. He is capable of loving. Ellen G. White described it in these terms.

The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.—Ellen G. White, *Ms 20*, 1906; *Evangelism* 617.1; *FLB* 52.3; *20MR* 69.1.

9. Could we have a close working relationship with the Holy Spirit if He is merely an impersonal force—a wind or fire? Or, is the *Holy Spirit* just another word for Jesus coming in a form which cannot be seen. If Jesus is no longer capable of being Omnipresent, then He can only be in one place at a time, and He could not keep His promise to the disciples that He would be with them wherever they were.
10. It is true that as we think about Jesus Christ, it is easy for us to imagine Him as a human being because of His time on this earth. We often associate the Father with Jesus Christ and think of Him also as a Personal Being. But, the Holy Spirit is often pictured in ways that are a little bit harder for us to wrap our minds around.
11. Read Acts 15:28. This is the conclusion from that very important early—perhaps first—general conference meeting held in Jerusalem. What do you think James had in mind when he said, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"? (Acts 15:28, *NASB*) If the Holy Spirit were nothing more than an impersonal force, there is no way that He could have an intelligent capacity to cooperate with that group in making such a choice.
12. Read Matthew 28:19. We are to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note that in the Greek, the noun, *onoma*, is singular. This suggests that all Three of Them are basically of the same nature. They are all described by that one name.

There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who

receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies, Series B*, No. 7, 63.2; *Evangelism* 615; HP 336.2; 7SDABC 441.9; *BTS*, March 1, 1906, par. 2.

13. Read John 14:6 and 17:17. How was the word *truth* being used? And what does it mean in those passages? What did Jesus mean when He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life”? How does that relate to His later expression in John 17:17 (*GNB*): “Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth”? Through much of the Gospel of John, the word *truth* is used in a very special way. In our Western way of thinking, influenced by Greek philosophy, we tend to think of truth as abstract ideas; but, in the Scriptures, and particularly in John’s Gospel, *truth* carries a very personal meaning. Jesus is the Truth.
14. Read John 15:26 and 16:13. If He had been talking about Himself, why would Jesus say: “When ... the Spirit comes ...”? (John 16:13, *GNB*) These verses describe one of the most important aspects of the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit, who **reveals the truth about God** ... will speak about me.” (John 15:26, *GNB*) [Bold type is added.] He not only reveals the truth about God, but also He will lead you into all truth. There are few things that are more important to us at this point in history than to understand the truth about God. That is an essential element in understanding the great controversy.
15. Read Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 31:5. In these verses God is described as a God of all truth. So, if the Spirit is a part of the Godhead, He should be the Spirit of Truth. (See John 14:17 and 16:13.)
16. So, in what sense is Jesus “the truth”? Jesus is the truth in the sense that virtually any question that we might ask about God and His kingdom can be answered by looking at the life and death of Jesus. Thus, He was and is the truth about God. Compare John 18:37 where Jesus said that He came to bear witness to the truth.
17. So, what would be wrong with thinking of the Holy Spirit merely as a Divine Force—wind or fire?

If He is a divine person, and we think of Him as an impersonal influence, we are robbing a divine person of the deference, honor, and love that is His due.—LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 40.

If we think of the Holy Spirit only as a mysterious divine power, our thoughts will be: *How can I have more of the Holy Spirit?* But if we think of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person, we will ask: *How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?* The decisive point is: Do you want to possess the Holy Spirit, or do you want the Holy Spirit to possess you? Do you resist His influence, or are you willing to follow Him in joyful obedience (*see Rom. 8:12-14, Gal. 5:18-24*)? Do you want to use the Holy Spirit according to your plans, or do you rely on Him so that He can enable you to become more like Jesus Christ and do what He has in mind for you? Do you take seriously the fact that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” (*1 Cor. 6:19, NASB*), and are you willing to glorify God with how you live?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, January 26.

18. Read Romans 5:5 and Ephesians 2:18-19. Paul was making an appeal for Christians to love each other, and he suggested that the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the capacity

to have that kind of love. He described the Holy Spirit as a Gift—God’s gift to us. Thus, the Holy Spirit is working to put together the true family of God. If we recognize the Holy Spirit as a personal Comforter, Helper, and Assistant, it is much easier to relate to Him. It is easier for us to allow Him to use us instead of trying to use Him.

19. Could we look forward to giving the Holy Spirit a big hug when we get to heaven?
20. “We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 672. Compare Philippians 2:13 (GNB): “God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.”
21. Ellen White made some very striking statements about the work of the Holy Spirit; we should pay attention.

Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. **Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.**

Of the Spirit Jesus said, “He shall glorify Me.” The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. **The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 671.2-3.

We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us. Through the Spirit God works in His people “to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Phil. 2:13. But many will not submit to this. They want to manage themselves. This is why they do not receive the heavenly gift. **Only to those who wait humbly upon God, who watch for His guidance and grace, is the Spirit given.** The power of God awaits their demand and reception. **This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train.** It is given according to the riches of the grace of Christ, and He is ready to supply every soul according to the capacity to receive.—*Ibid.* 672.1. [Bold type is added.]

22. Do we have any reason to question the personality of the Father? Or, the Son? If not, why should we question the personality and personhood of the Holy Spirit? Do we want to deny the loving, caring, comforting presence of the Third Person of the Godhead? If we believe in the Trinity, we will find ourselves in opposition to the beliefs of Jews and Muslims who do not believe that either Jesus or the Holy Spirit are divine. Is that a reason for us to reject the divinity or even the identity of the Holy Spirit? Or, even of Jesus Himself?
23. As we noted in an earlier lesson, when speaking about the school and the property at Avondale in Australia, Ellen White said:

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 66*, 1899; *Evangelism* 616.5; *TMR* 299.2; *2SAT* 136.6.

24. So, are we ready to accept the personality and personhood of the Holy Spirit?
25. What are the characteristics of a person? What gives an individual personality? Are we prepared to let the Holy Spirit speak to us through His Word as He testifies to the work of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels? It is His special work to help us understand the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. We do not need to worry about having access to the Holy Spirit. Wherever we may go and under whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, He is there. He is prepared to guide, counsel, encourage, strengthen, and inspire us with hope.
26. Let us review. There are three basics of personality which are essential in our understanding of the Holy Spirit: 1) He has a mind that thinks and reasons; 2) He has a will that He exercises by correctly representing the Father and the Son; and 3) He is able to speak what He thinks and communicate to human beings. It was thus that He brought us the Holy Scriptures. We will speak more about how He communicates and has communicated in our next lesson.
27. It is true that we often equate personhood with visibility. It is much harder for us to imagine a Person who is invisible. Some of His characteristics such as His omnipresence are mysterious to us. Infinite things are difficult for the human mind to comprehend. But, remember that just because we may not fully understand something does not mean that it does not exist. How many details of biology, chemistry, and physics do we not fully understand?
28. Jesus repeatedly described the Holy Spirit as a Comforter, Helper, or Guide. Sometimes, we bring the Greek word right into English as *Parakletos/Paraklete*. For a bit more detail about that word, see:

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=VT0000499>

29. In ancient times, someone who was called into court to be accused was allowed to have a *parakletos*. That person might help the accused physically, mentally, emotionally, and/or psychologically. In addition to food, blankets, and/or water, that person might provide legal aid. There is no situation that we could face in which the Holy Spirit would not be a Present Help.
30. So, what do we mean when we say the Holy Spirit has a mind and a will? Clearly, the mind is the center of thought. It is there that we reason and we have a conscience and we make decisions. The Bible tells us that we may have the mind of Christ. (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16) We are urged to be of the same mind (Romans 12:16, *KJV*; Philippians 4:2, *KJV*) and of one mind. (2 Corinthians 13:11, *KJV*) The Holy Spirit will help us in living that way with our fellow believers.
31. So, just as the ability to think is a defining characteristic of personhood, so is the ability to choose or to have a will or free will. Animals have minds; but, they do not have free wills or free choices. God created us with that capacity which He did not give to animals.

The will is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or choice. Every human being possessed of reason has power to choose the right. In every experience of life, God's word to us is, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Joshua 24:15. Every one may place his will on the side of the will of God, may choose to obey Him, and by thus linking himself with divine agencies, he may stand where nothing can force him to do evil.—Ellen

G. White, *Education* 289.1.

32. We are repeatedly told that the right exercise of the will—with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—will help us to develop Godly characters. The Holy Spirit is a separate, distinct Personality. He thinks, reasons, makes decisions, and chooses. In our next lesson we will see how He communicates. Along with the Father and the Son, He is an essential part of the Trinity. Is that talking about three distinct Persons? Or, as some believe, is it talking about three forms of the same Person?
33. So, what practical things could we do to hear the voice of God speaking through the Holy Spirit as we read God's Word? We are giving the Holy Spirit access to our minds when we focus on communicating with God through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. The more familiar we are with the Bible and its ways of thinking and talking, the easier it will be for us to understand the speech of the Holy Spirit. He is a powerful Ally in overcoming sin and enabling us to live joyful and abundant Christian lives.
34. Shouldn't each one of us will, desire, and choose to cooperate in every way possible with the Holy Spirit?

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