

What We Believe...About The Holy Spirit
John 14:15-27

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I sometimes say that in our Baptist circles, of the three persons of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – it often seems to me that the Holy Spirit is regarded as kind of the “low man on the totem pole”. That is, the Holy Spirit takes a comparatively “back seat” in terms of how much attention and importance we assign to Him. Now you may object to that characterization but as I turned to our hymnal to find hymns having to do with the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit is this morning’s topic, the topical index of hymn subjects at the front of the hymnal listed 126 hymns having to do with God the Father, 199 hymns having to do with God the Son, and just 8 having to do with the Holy Spirit!

Now my argument is not that we should have the same number of hymns for each one but rather that perhaps we haven’t understood the true significance of the Holy Spirit and His work. Our Christian brothers and sisters in the charismatic and Pentecostal churches may tend to *over-emphasize* the Holy Spirit, or at least over-emphasize some aspects of His work, in our view of things but we could learn from them a greater appreciation for His role in our salvation and in our daily life.

So let’s dive in by noting that the Holy Spirit was present and a part of creating the world just as Scripture says God the Father and the Son were (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16). In Genesis 1:2 we read “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

Although we commonly think of the Spirit’s work especially in the New Testament age, He was clearly present in the Old Testament as well. Numbers 11:25 records that God took His Spirit, which He had given to Moses to perform leadership tasks, “and put the Spirit on...seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied....” So it’s clear that a major part of the Holy Spirit’s work throughout the OT was to give prophets the message God wanted them to say.

God also gave His Spirit to various individuals for various tasks. A man named Bezalel was given the Spirit so that he would have the ability to head up the construction team for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-5). God also gave His Spirit to regional leaders like Othniel and Gideon (Judges 3:7-10; 6:34) and kings like Saul and David (I Samuel 10:10; II Samuel 23:2) so they had the wisdom and ability to know what God wanted and to lead their people.

What’s noteworthy about the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT was that He was given by God *only* to specific individuals to enable them to say certain things or perform specific tasks. But God could also withdraw His Spirit from people, as He did from King Saul (I Samuel 16:14; Psalm 51:11) as a form of judgement on their disobedience.

As we move into the New Testament era, which is also the time period you and I continue to live in, the role of the Holy Spirit changes dramatically. This was anticipated by God's word to the prophet Joel, who said in Joel 2:28,29 "[28] 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.'" In other words, a day was coming, our day, when God's Spirit would be with *all* His people and not just certain ones to enable them to do certain things.

Before we tackle what the Holy Spirit's role is in the NT era, it's worth noting that He is the Holy SPIRIT, which is much to be preferred to the King James Version's unfortunate translation, the "Holy Ghost", which conjures up images of "Casper the Friendly Ghost"! He can be grieved (Isaiah 63:10) when people disobey Him, and He searches, commands, intercedes, etc., so He's someone we should think of as a person and not just some unknowable mist.

And He's fully divine. We find the Holy Spirit mentioned on equal terms with the Father and the Son in Matthew 28:19 "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and the Apostle Paul says in II Corinthians 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Among many other evidences that the Spirit is divine is that He's called "God's Spirit" in I Corinthians 3:16; He's present everywhere (Psalm 139:7); the Spirit had the honor of inaugurating Jesus' earthly ministry at His baptism when the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16,17), and He raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11). And, although theologians have argued about it down through the ages, it seems clear in the NT that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both God the Father and the Son, sent by them both to do carry out His work (John 14:26;15:26, Romans 8:9).

By now you're saying, "That's all great, Pastor Jeff, but what does the Holy Spirit do for me?" Well, of course, He's told us everything we know about God by inspiring men to write the Scriptures we have (II Peter 1:20,21). He also gave Christ a body by causing the Virgin Mary to be pregnant so that Jesus could be our sacrifice (Matthew 1:18). And although we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1), we're told in Titus 3:5 that God "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit". In other words, without God's Spirit we would still be lost in sin and far from God but because the Spirit reaches out to us and opens our eyes, we can come to know Christ as our Savior. More than that, the Holy Spirit lives right inside us (Romans 8:9,11). In fact, our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19), which also means that we need to be careful how we live, using our bodies to glorify the God who lives within us.

As believers we each receive specific gifts from the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:4-11) – wisdom, knowledge, serving, teaching, giving, leading, etc. – to use in service to God. Sometimes believers argue over whether the more miraculous gifts

such as the power to heal or speaking in tongues still operate today. Tongues, as you may know, are often described as utterances a person makes as he or she is moved by the Holy Spirit that may or may not be intelligible to them or others. Although for the sake of unity here in our church we don't practice these gifts publicly, and I don't think they are as prevalent as they were in Bible times, I can't say biblically that they don't exist anymore. I *do* think that unfortunately many Christians today fail to exercise them in accordance with Scripture. And I definitely do *not* think that something like the gift of speaking in tongues is a so-called "second blessing", given only to Christians who are *really filled* with the Holy Spirit. Each person who receives Christ as their Savior gets His Spirit and all of His Spirit, you can't get any more of Him. The question isn't "are you filled with the Holy Spirit?" because you are. The *real* question is, "are you allowing the Holy Spirit to conform you into the likeness of Jesus?" In other words, the Spirit's in you but does He have a hold of you? Have you asked Him to examine your thoughts and words and behavior to show you where they need to change to become more like Jesus? And have you asked the Spirit to give you the willingness and power to change? Because He is more than willing to do all that for you, in fact, it's part of why God gave Him to us.

This kind of personal ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus' followers was made possible, of course, by Christ Himself, who knew we would need help after He returned to heaven. Jesus told His disciples that He would send a Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to teach us and remind us of Jesus' words (John 14:26), and to lead us into God's truth (John 16:13), which is why when we read the Bible we should ask for His help to understand it.

Jesus made good on that promise to send the Spirit to His disciples as we read in Acts 2:2-4 "[2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Since this experience isn't repeated in the NT, we know that this was a unique event. The Spirit doesn't usually come with sounds and wind and what appears to be fire – those were signs given to those first disciples to let them know that the unseen Holy Spirit was now empowering them. For most Christians, the Spirit's presence is felt quietly as He helps us feel God's love (Romans 5:5) and know that Jesus lives in us (1 John 3:24), He helps us in our weakness, and He sanctifies us (Romans 8:26; 15:16), among other things. In fact, He gives us all sorts of blessings the Apostle Paul calls "fruit" in Galatians 5:22,23 "[22] ...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control."

And part of the Spirit's role is to keep reminding us that no matter what Satan may whisper in our ears when we sin and mess up, we are still children of God. Ephesians 1:13,14 "[13] And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

We could go on and on about all the things that the Holy Spirit does but I want to end this morning's sermon with a story a pastor told about his teenage daughter, Jodie. In high school she'd had a lot of doubts about her faith but God kept pursuing her and eventually, after high school, she said she wanted to serve a year in a medical mission in Haiti. Her father wasn't anxious to send her for so long but since she felt God was leading her to do it, he agreed.

One night she emailed him about an experience she'd just had. She been called to a Haitian woman's hut to help deliver a baby and no one else was available. While there, a voodoo priestess came in, chanting and anointing the woman. She stood at the head of this woman and stared a hole through that pastor's daughter. Jodie said, "When I was getting ready to deliver this baby, I just looked back at her, and I started singing. I knew she didn't understand English, but I just started singing: 'Our God is an awesome God, he reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love, our God is an awesome God.'" Jodie said that the voodoo lady became completely unglued. She grabbed all of her stuff and ran out of the hut. Jodie wrote, "That night I knew that that baby was going to be born with the blessing of God and not the curse of Satan."

I believe that though she had no idea what was coming, the Holy Spirit helped Jodie face down the evil of Satan in that hut that night. And I believe He helps all of us in countless ways – to know God's truth, to discern His will for our lives, to speak and be a witness for Him, to live as He wants us to, and He holds onto us even when we are having trouble holding onto our own faith.

God the Holy Spirit is no 'low man on the totem pole' of the Trinity. As you read the NT, begin looking for all the things He does and you'll be amazed at how truly significant, how truly powerful, and how truly important He really is to you.