

Lectures on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Lecture 1

Deity and Personality of the Spirit

Introduction

1. The subject of the Holy Spirit has always been fraught with problems in exegesis and doctrine. Why is this? Partly because it is difficult to conceive of the Holy Spirit as a Person. We can think of God the Father with no difficulty, there is a “personality” element in the very word “Father”. We can unite with this title. Jesus, as the Son of God is also without difficulty given that He appeared on earth as a man – the God Man. But, when it comes to the Holy Spirit we are trouble by the concept of “a Spirit”.
2. The AV translation of the Bible did not help us with this problem when it rendered so often the Holy Spirit as “the Holy Ghost”. It helped to separate the concept of personality from the Spirit given the Spirit an “it” rather than a “him”, and at the same time with the use of the word “ghost” gave an ethereal feel about the Holy Spirit. How can we imagine the Spirit to be a Person? This is understandable difficult. Many people are still using the personal pronoun “it” because of this problem.
3. Furthermore, the NT Greek word for “Spirit” is neither masculine or feminine, but neuter. This also has aided the concept that the Spirit is a power, or force rather than a Person. Therefore we struggle with our understanding of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps in our minds we still conceive of the Spirit as some kind of vague powerful energy that we need from time to time, but cannot of course be worshipped or prayed to.
4. This I believe has allowed us to think less of the Holy Spirit in preference for the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit has been in danger of becoming the Cinderella of Christian doctrine and thinking. He is the forgotten Person. He hangs somewhere in the background but has no meaningful relationship with Christian people other than to be this spiritual energy given in times of need.
5. Compounding this problem has also been a mistaken concept of the Holy Spirit’s task as interpreted from John 16:14 when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, “He will glorify

me". The impression taken from this part of the verse is that the Spirit does not reveal Himself or draw attention to Himself; He is unassuming. His task is merely to present Jesus and glorify Him and then recede into the background. This is a mistaken interpretation.

6. In John 16:12-14 Jesus is informing His disciples that He has much more teaching to give them when He has returned to the Father. The Holy Spirit will continue with the teaching of Jesus with further revelations. In this respect the Spirit will "glorify" Jesus because "He will take what is mine and declare it to you". The little word "for" in verse 14 is often overlooked, but it explains what Jesus meant when He said that the Holy Spirit would "not speak on His own authority" (vs 13; compare also Jesus not speaking on His own authority Jn 14:10. This is why Paul could say confidently that his teaching came through "revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12).
7. It is helpful and spiritual healthy for us to review our understanding of the Person and role of the Holy Spirit. If we could grasp something of His Deity and Personality it would also assist us in our understanding of His work. The Holy Spirit is God and is a distinct Person of the Trinity. Our task is two fold. We must prove that the Holy Spirit is God, equal to the Father and the Son, and at the same time establish His personality, thus demonstrating the Spirit's position with the Godhead as the Third Person in the Trinity.

1. The Holy Spirit as God

- 1:1 The Spirit is God. The NT freely ascribed deity to the Holy Spirit, making Him equal in every way to the Father and the Son. For example, the powerful title of deity " Lord" Κυριος (Kurios LXX term for יהוה Yahweh in the OT) is given to the Holy Spirit without embarrassment by the NT writers. Here is 2 Cor 3:17. 18 we read, "*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*". The key words here are "the Lord is the Spirit". Tasker comments on this phrase, "*Paul is not confusing the Persons of the Trinity by identifying Christ and the Spirit.....The Lord and the Spirit are one in the same sense that Jesus said that He and the Father were one*" (Jn 10:30). Just as Christ is "Lord" so the Spirit is "Lord". The two Persons are identical in deity, eternity, quality etc.

- 1:2 The same expression is found in the following verse, *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18). Here the key words are, *“...the Lord who is the Spirit”*. Again Tasker comments, *“...the translation “the Spirit of the Lord” (favoured by the AV and NKJV) is not the most natural rendering. Modern scholars, therefore, rightly retain the original order and construe the words, “the Lord the Spirit”, or “the Lord who is the Spirit”*. So, we are permitted to call the Spirit, *“The Lord Holy Spirit”*.
- 1:3 Another interesting and important way the NT writers considered the Holy Spirit to be equal in every way to God the Father and the God the Son was shown in their free use of Old Testament quotations. In particular the writer to the Hebrews liberally makes use of quotations from the OT to prove to the Christian Jews the superior nature of the Christian Gospel. In making these quotations, he ascribes their authorship to the Holy Spirit, whereas originally the OT ascribes them to Yahweh.
- 1:4 For example; Hebrews 10:16 quotes an OT passage like this, *“ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”*. This passage is taken from Jer 31:33 *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people”*. Spot the difference! The difference is this; in the OT passage the words are spoken by Yahweh *“declares the Lord”*, but in the Hebrews passage it begins with *“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying.....”*.
- 1:5 Similarly, Hebrews 3:7-8 we read, *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness”*. This quotation of the OT comes from Psalm 95:7-8 which reads, *“For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness”*. Again, these words in the NT are attributed to the Holy Spirit, although in the OT they would come from Yahweh.
- 1:6 Furthermore, other NT writers follow a similar pattern. In Acts 28: 25, we read, *“ And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement:*

"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." . . . ". This is taken from Isaiah 6:9-10 "And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." In the OT statement the speaker is clearly Yahweh, yet in the NT the speaker is the Holy Spirit.

- 1:7 In the minds of the NT writers Yahweh and the Holy Spirit were equal Persons in the Trinity. They could easily swop from Yahweh to the Holy Spirit – the two were One. They did not consider the Holy Spirit to be a lesser being than God the Father.
- 1:8 This teaching proves the point made by Peter (2 Pet 1:20) when speaking about scriptural inspiration he said, " men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit". Although in the OT the prophets spoke as they received the word from Yahweh (e.g., "Thus the Lord God spoke to me...." Jer 25:15) the NT writers put it differently. They said, "... *the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories* (1 Peter 1:10-11). This was not a contradiction, rather it expressed their belief that the Holy Spirit was in fact God the Lord, Yahweh.
- 1:9 In addition to material of this nature, we find in the NT various Divine attributes given to the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit was not God then it would be blasphemy to speak of the Holy Spirit in this manner. These are the attributes that Scripture gives to Yahweh and the Son of God. The conclusion must be, therefore, that the Holy Spirit also is God, equal to the Father and the Son.
- 1:10 These are the Divine perfections attributed to the Holy Spirit:
- i) Eternity: He is called, " *The eternal Spirit*" (Heb 9:14), thereby sharing eternity with the Father and the Son; there being no time when the Holy Spirit did not exist. He was not a created being.

- ii) Divine Power: we read, "mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit" (Rom 15:19). The term "power" is attributed to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit has this "power" in His own right and does not have to utilise the power of God as we do.
- iii) Sovereignty: Isaiah says, "*Who has directed the Spirit (Hebrew & NIV "mind") of the Lord...*" (Is 40:13). There is no external control over the Holy Spirit. He acts by His own right and authority just as the Father and the Son.
- iv) Holiness: the Spirit is called, the "Holy Spirit". The attribute of "holiness" belongs to the Father and the Son, yet this attribute is repeated given to the Spirit. Paul writes about the resurrection of Jesus by "*the Spirit of Holiness*" (Rom 1:4).
- v) The Holy Spirit is described to us as being equal to the Son of God when Jesus spoke these words, "*I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor*" (John 14:17). There are two Greek terms for "*another*". In the first place we have the Greek *ἕτερος* (heteros) meaning "*another of a different kind*", and *ἄλλος* (allos) means "*another of the same kind*". The term used in John 14:17 is *ἄλλος* (allos) meaning, the Holy Spirit would be of the same kind in nature, power and deity as Jesus.
- vi) The Holy Spirit has the divine attribute of omnipresence. In Psalm 139:7-10 "*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me*". This is a quality of deity known by the Father and the Son (see also 1 Cor 2:10-11. The Holy Spirit is God.
- vii) The baptismal formula, Matt 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" shows us how the Holy Spirit is placed alongside of the Father and the Son. Also notice how there are three Persons of the Trinity mentioned but only one "name". Three persons should have three names. But in this instance there is only one Godhead so the three Persons come under one single "name".

2. The Holy Spirit as a Person

- 2:1 It is difficult for us to think of the Holy Spirit as a Person given the terms we use such as "Spirit". The AV created a problem when the Greek was translated as "Ghost". Yet, the Bible would have us think of the Holy Spirit with a Personality and must be spoken of as the in the third person masculine even though the Greek is written as a neuter. The Greek is merely following the rules of grammar, so the word for "spirit" is a neuter noun. However, we will find that these rules are sometimes broken with the use of personal, masculine pronouns given to the Holy Spirit. We must resist thinking and speaking of the Holy Spirit as "it".
- 2:2 Personality characteristics are given to the Holy Spirit in the NT. For example, the Holy Spirit communicates using spoken words, "*The Spirit said to Philip*" (Acts 8:29); "*The Spirit said to Him ...*" (Acts 10:19 , also Acts 13:2). If we were to think of the Spirit as merely a "*force or energy*" like electricity we could not consider Him as One who is able to talk. Within these three passages we are shown how the Spirit actually communicated with people using words commensurate with their own language. This alone should be sufficient to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is a Person and should, therefore, be addressed as "*he*", for only people can speak; electricity does not speak!
- 2:3 In order to enforce this idea of personality the NT writers described the Holy Spirit as One who can "teach". Jesus encouraged His disciples in times of persecution by saying, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:12). Then again Jesus told the disciples that although He still had much to say to them the Holy Spirit would becoming their teacher: "*When the Spirit of truth is come, He shall guide you into all truth....*" (John 16:12f). This "teaching" and "guiding" can only be done by a person. The Holy Spirit is a Person.
- 2:4 There is an interesting comment made by Paul in Romans 15:30 when he said, "*I appeal to you brethren....by the love of the Spirit*" (Rom 15:30). Commentators are divided over the interpretation. Some say this "love" is that quality of Christian expression that is created in us through the Spirit, i.e., part of the "fruit of the Spirit. Others, however, say that the Greek shows this emotional term "love" to be a quality of the Holy Spirit. Just as God is love; and Jesus expresses love, so the Spirit also has love for His people. The Holy Spirit can love; only a person can love; the Holy Spirit is a Person.

- 2:5 Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the “counsellor”, or “helper”; John 14:16 *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”* (See also 1 John 2:2). The Greek word παράκλητον (parakleton) means “advocate” and usually refers to a solicitor or barrister, namely a person. If we think of the Spirit as a “counsellor” this also points to the role of a Person.
- 2:6 We are warned by Paul not to “grieve the Holy Spirit”: Eph 4:30 *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”*. You can only “grieve” a person; it is impossible to “grieve” a force or power. The Holy Spirit is a Person with feelings, sensitivity which is to be expected in a Person.
- 2:7 Let us now observe the use of the personal masculine pronouns when describing the Holy Spirit. Because the Greek word “Spirit” is neuter it follows that any pronouns referring to the Spirit (the antecedents) should also be neuter according to the rules of Grammar. However, this is not always the case.
- 2:8 Consider for example, *“When the Spirit of truth comes He shall guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). The NT writers have correctly used the masculine demonstrative pronoun “He” because the Greek has ἐκεῖνος (ekeinos) which is the masculine form of the pronoun and not ἐκεῖνο (ekeino) which is the neuter of the pronoun. The pronoun refers back to “the Spirit”. Just as the noun is neuter, so should also the pronoun be neuter. But the NT writers, knowing that the Holy Spirit is a Person, have used the masculine demonstrative pronoun.
- 2:9 Similarly, in John 15:26 *“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”*, the masculine pronoun is used, ἐκεῖνος (ekeinos) *“He will testify”*, not the neuter which would have been the case if the Spirit was thought of as being impersonal.
- 2:10 The rules are again changed in Paul’s statement about the Holy Spirit in Eph 1:14 *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of*

our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory". In this case Paul uses the relative pronoun "who". The antecedent of the pronoun is the "Holy Spirit" which is neuter. But the relative pronoun "who" (Greek \acute{o} ho) is masculine.

2:11 We must conclude, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is a Person in the same sense as the Father and the Son. He must be referred to as a Person with a "*He*" and not an "*it*".

2:12 Indeed, our final conclusion has to be that the Holy Spirit is equal in every way to the Father and the Son within the Trinity. All are "*God*" and all are Persons. The doctrine of the Trinity then is, "*One God comprising within this single Godhead, three distinct and yet equal Persons*".

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לְחַזֵּנוֹת בְּנֵעָם (Psa 27:4 WTT) **Sibylline Oracle** (SIB 3:17 OPE)