

Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

There is a reason why the Holy Spirit does not receive the same level and kind of attention that is focused upon the Father and the Son: it is not His purpose to attract that kind of attention to himself. Just as the Son voluntarily chose to take the role of Suffering Servant so as to redeem God's people, so, too, the Spirit has chosen to take the role as Sanctifier and Advocate of the people of God. But since it is the Spirit's role to direct the hearts of men to Christ, and to conform them to His image, He does not seek to push himself into the forefront and gain attention for himself.

One result of this voluntary role of the Spirit in the work of salvation¹ is that the evidences of His personality and deity are not as numerous or obvious as those for the Father or the Son. He is not "up front" and is not spoken of as often as the other persons. Some take this as evidence of inferiority, but as we have noted before, *difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature.*

There are two issues to address when looking at the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. Due to the fact that some deny His personality, we must establish the clear truth that the Holy Spirit is not merely a "force" or "power," but is, in fact, a person. Having established this, we must then demonstrate that He is an eternal person, Deity, along with the Father and the Son.

HE, NOT IT

One of the ways the *New World Translation* of Jehovah's Witnesses attempts to undermine the Trinity is by consistently rendering the phrase "Holy Spirit" as "holy spirit." When possible, they omit the article, resulting in strange renderings like "That one will baptize YOU people with holy spirit" (Matthew 3:11), "and he will be filled with holy spirit right from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15), and "she was found to be pregnant by holy spirit before they were united" (Matthew 1:18). Their intention is clear: the Watchtower Society denies that the Holy Spirit is a person, hence, they desire their "translation" of the Bible to communicate the idea that the Holy Spirit is an "it," a force or power.

Of course, the argument that is often heard is that the phrase "Holy Spirit" in Greek is in the neuter gender, and it is.² But Greek genders do not necessarily indicate personality.³ Inanimate things can have masculine and feminine genders, and personal things can have the neuter gender. We cannot automatically insert the pronoun "it" when referring to every neuter noun any more than we should always insert the pronoun "she" for "love," since love in Greek is feminine.⁴ Instead, we determine whether the Holy Spirit is personal the same way we would demonstrate that the Father or the Son is a person. Does the Spirit exhibit personality by speaking, using personal pronouns, and doing other things that only persons can do? Does the Spirit have a will? Can we insult or resist the Holy Spirit?

One of the clearest indications of the personhood of the Spirit is His use of the personal pronoun in reference to himself. That is, I prove my own personhood by speaking of myself as "I" and "me." The Spirit likewise speaks of himself in this way. When the Spirit set aside

Barnabas and Saul, He did so personally:

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

The work of ministry is a work unto the Lord, but here the Spirit not only speaks of himself with the personal pronoun "Me," but we see that we are to view the calling to the service of God as a ministry unto the Holy Spirit himself. Earlier in Acts the Spirit had referred to himself in the same way:

While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him; "Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself" (Acts 10:19-20).

The Spirit speaks to Peter and again uses a personal pronoun, indicating His sovereign action in sending the men to Peter. Impersonal forces do not send men, speak, or use personal pronouns in reference to their actions.

Likewise, the Spirit is referred to by the Son as a person. When teaching the apostles about the future ministry of the Spirit among them, the Lord said,

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)

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (John 16:13-14)

The Spirit here *testifies* about the Lord Jesus. The Spirit *guides* disciples, He *speaks*, and He *discloses* future events. He *glorifies* Christ as well. Each of these activities indicate personality.

The speaking of the Spirit is found throughout the text of the Bible. We have already seen some references in Acts. Two others should be noted:

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot" (Acts 8:29).

And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'" (Acts 21:11).

But the Spirit speaks in another vital way as well:

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).

This tremendously special manner of speaking is very much like what the Spirit does in His work of intercession for the elect as Paul discusses it in Romans 8:26-27:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. (Romans 8:26-27)

Here the Spirit "helps," "intercedes with groanings," and "intercedes for the saints."⁵ Impersonal forces do not help, groan, or intercede in this obviously intensely personal fashion. The very act of intercession demands personality. So, likewise, does the act of "searching" and "knowing the thoughts of God" predicated of the Spirit by Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians:

For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is

in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)

Only persons “know” things. Electricity “knows” nothing, experiences nothing. Yet the Spirit knows the thoughts of God (the greatest task to which the creature man can be called). We dare not miss what else this means: The thoughts of God are infinite even as He is infinite. Therefore, the Spirit must likewise be omniscient, an attribute of deity itself.

The Spirit is likewise sovereign in His rule in the church. He sets apart elders and overseers in the congregation:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

An overseer (elder, bishop) is one who truly holds that office at the will of the Spirit, who guides and directs the church. Only a person can appoint elders with wisdom so as to meet the needs of the church.

The Spirit is also a *witness*:

And we are witnesses of these things; and *so is* the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

Another striking evidence of the personality of the Spirit is His role in bringing the very love of God for His people into their lives.

... and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)

The love of God has been poured out in the hearts of the redeemed by the means of the Holy Spirit. How can such an assertion be understood apart from the personhood of the Spirit? Can love be poured into our hearts by electricity? Flowing water? Nameless, faceless cosmic forces? Love, by its very nature, requires that the one bearing it be personal. Otherwise, it becomes something far less than the true love

of God. Paul takes up this theme elsewhere:

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)

The "love of the Spirit" was as common and understandable a reality to the Roman believers as was the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There simply is no reason to believe that the Spirit was not viewed in as personal a category as the Lord himself. That is why Matthew would record these words of the Lord Jesus without ever thinking them strange:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

It is self-evident that the Father is a person; so also is the Son. How, then, could two persons share a single name with a nonperson, a mere force? The willingness of the Scripture writers to associate the Spirit in this way with both the Father and the Son is plain evidence of His personality.

Another of the many ways in which the personality of the Spirit is shown comes to us from Jesus' teaching on the "unpardonable sin." Both Matthew and Mark record the Lord's words:

"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but 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).

"Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-29).

Everyone would recognize exactly what the Lord is speaking of

when He refers to “speaking a word against the Son of Man.” The Pharisees had been doing this all through His ministry. Their words of blasphemy had been directed at Him *personally*. In the same way, then, the words spoken “against the Holy Spirit” are placed in direct parallel with the words spoken against the Son of Man. We have no reason to believe that there would be any less personal element in their blasphemy when speaking of the Spirit than when speaking of the Son. They were attributing the work of Christ in doing good to evil sources. Jesus points out that in reality they are accusing the Holy Spirit of God of doing the very deeds of the devil. Such an action shows such spiritual blindness and perversity that the Lord warns that they are committing an “eternal sin” by blaspheming the Spirit of God.

Not only can someone blaspheme the Spirit, they can insult Him as well:

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:29)

Likewise, the Spirit can be *grieved*:

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

An impersonal force cannot be grieved, pained, or injured, nor can a mere “force” or “power” seal believers for the day of redemption. And it was a serious accusation made by Stephen against the Jewish people when he accused them of resisting the Holy Spirit:

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51).

But the single greatest indisputable testimony to the personality (and, in fact, the deity) of the Holy Spirit is found in His giving gifts to believers in the church. Paul explained to the Corinthians that there

are different kinds of gifts given to members of the body of Christ, yet there is only one church, one body. One of the ways the unity of the church is seen is that there is only one source of these gifts: the Spirit of God. He emphasizes this truth in explaining the various manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit:

... to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:9-11)

There is only one Spirit bringing all the gifts to the redeemed. And He does this, not on the basis of how *we* think the gifts should be given, but instead He gives them "just as He wills." The word translated "wills" is the Greek term *boulomai*. It is used only of persons and refers to the volitional act of the will. For example, the Son *wills* to reveal the Father to His people:

"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills (*boulomai*) to reveal *Him*" (Matthew 11:27).

Likewise, the Father "wills" using the same term:

In the same way God, desiring (*boulomai*) even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath. (Hebrews 6:17)

So if we can plainly see that the Son's *willing* is an act of a person, and the Father's *willing* is likewise the act of a person, how can we possibly avoid recognizing that the Spirit sovereignly and wisely gives His gifts to the church just as *He wills* to do so, and that this makes Him, inarguably, a person?

There is one concept used of the Spirit that is often thrown out as evidence against His personhood. We often hear, "The Spirit cannot be a person, because we are baptized in the Spirit, and hence, you can't be baptized in a person, but in a substance or a force." Yet, in reality, the Bible speaks of our being baptized into Christ Jesus in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27, and neither passage is ever cited to make the point that *Jesus* is not a person. All through the New Testament we are said to be "in Christ" or "in Him," and this is never taken to mean that Jesus is not a person. Likewise, being baptized in the Holy Spirit does not deny He is a person—rather, it speaks to His omnipresence and spirituality.

THE SPIRIT AS GOD

It can be well argued that once the personality of the Spirit is established, the argument about His deity is over. The "Spirit of God" who is said to be omnipresent (Psalm 139:7), omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), and active in the very creation itself (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30) hardly fits the description of some kind of lesser being. But the fact that this Spirit shares the one divine name with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19) makes His deity indisputable.

Yet there are a number of references to the deity of the Spirit that should be noted, especially since there are so many who denigrate the Spirit's glory and deny His rightful honor. The most often cited passage is found in the words of the apostle Peter:

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3-4)

To whom did Ananias lie? To the Holy Spirit, or to God? Both, for to lie to the Spirit is to lie to God.

Another group of witnesses falls into the same pattern as those that testify to the fact that the Son is Yahweh. That is, we find the New

Testament writers applying passages to the Spirit that were originally written about Yahweh. Yahweh's words in the Old Testament become the Spirit's words in the New. For example, we again find the temple vision of Isaiah being used by the New Testament to reveal the richness of the nature and character of God. The very same passage from the commission of Isaiah is cited again, this time by Paul. In Isaiah Yahweh speaks and sends His prophet to the people with a message of doom (Isaiah 6:9). But note Paul's application:

And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE"'" (Acts 28:25-26).

It might immediately be objected that Paul is not intending to say that the Spirit literally spoke the words quoted, but instead caused them to be written in the Scriptures, that is, "inspired" them. And such would be a valid objection—but one that would only prove the point being made. It is quite true that the Spirit is often said to be the speaker of Scripture,⁶ the One by whom the written Word was brought into being. As Peter put it,

... for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21)

Literally Peter speaks of the Holy Spirit "carrying along" the human writers of Scripture. This supernatural guidance results in it being quite proper to speak of the Spirit "speaking" in the Scriptures, so intimately is He a part of the very fabric of the Holy Writings. But it is just as true that the Scriptures are "God-breathed" and are the very speaking of Yahweh himself (2 Timothy 3:16). Since there is no way to separate out the Spirit from the Scriptures, and since they are literally the words of God, only one logical conclusion can be derived: the Spirit is fully divine. No mere force, no mere creature, could take the role in the giving of the Holy Scriptures that is taken by the Spirit of God.

The intimate relationship of the Spirit to the other divine persons is illustrated by the comparison of each of the Synoptic Gospels as they record the Lord Jesus' promise to be with His people when they face persecution for His name's sake:

“When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).

Here the Lord Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will speak on behalf of His followers when they are brought before the authorities. But note Matthew's version of the same promise:

“But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:19–20).

Here we see that it is the “Spirit of your Father” who speaks in believers at such times of danger and persecution. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father. But Luke's version adds another viewpoint:

“So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute” (Luke 21:14–15).

Here the Lord's promise is direct, that it is *He* who will give them utterance. This is not a denial of the Spirit's role, nor a contradiction of what is recorded in the other Gospels. Instead, the “interpenetration” of the divine persons is seen in this passage, just as it is seen in the promise of the Lord to be with His people:

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

Jesus promises that the Father and He will dwell with those who love

Him and keep His word (i.e., the true disciples). Yet how does the Lord do this? He does so by His Spirit, whom He sends in His place. This is the point of the entire passage in John 14 and 16: Jesus sends another Comforter to be with His people for all time. And that Comforter is the Spirit. But so intimate is the relationship, so perfect the union, that to be indwelt by the Spirit is to have the Father and the Son abiding with us. So close is the relationship of the persons that Paul could describe the Spirit as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ within one short span:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Romans 8:9)

This powerful, life-giving person, the Spirit of God, is the one who brings spiritual life to God's people. He is the one who regenerates and causes us to be born again:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

That is why the early Christians could place the Spirit with the Father and the Son in their worship and their praise, and could pronounce as a doxology the following words:

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)

Grace is a divine gift and comes from a divine person, Jesus Christ. The love of God is divine and full and comes from the Father. And fellowship, likewise, is a rich term, full of meaning. We have been called into the "fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). Paul spoke of "fellowship with His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10).

Believers have fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). The fact that the Spirit indwells all believers, and provides the ground of our supernatural unity, results in true Christian fellowship—a sharing that knows no bounds. It is a divine fellowship, brought about by a divine person, the Holy Spirit of God, the eternal third person of the blessed Trinity.