

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #99:

BASIC BIBLE TRUTHS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

By John Temples

There are few Bible subjects more mysterious and/or intriguing than the Holy Spirit. In this article, we intend to present some basic truths about the Spirit. It is obvious that God did not intend for us to understand everything about the Holy Spirit (or Himself, for that matter). It is not essential that we master the nature of the Holy Spirit to go to heaven. It IS essential, however, to know some basic facts about the Spirit and to do the things the Holy Spirit gave us in the New Testament regarding our salvation.

Why is the Holy Spirit such a mysterious subject? Here are some reasons:

- *Denominational misconceptions and false teachings regarding the Spirit.* Wayne Jackson writes in a Christian Courier article on the Spirit: “A Watchtower publication asserts that the HS is the ‘active force’ of God. It is not a person but is a powerful force that God causes to emanate from Himself to accomplish His holy will....Mary Baker Eddy, founder of ‘Christian Science,’ characterized the [Holy Spirit] as ‘Divine Science.’ Parley Pratt, one of Mormonism’s original ‘apostles,’ once described the Holy Spirit as a force like magnetism or electricity. He further spoke of the Spirit as a ‘divine fluid’ and ‘impersonal energy.’” Other denominational authorities, and perhaps even some members of the Lord’s church, see the Spirit as some “inner presence”--a divine, intangible, irresistible force or influence that operates in our lives in some incomprehensible way, through hunches, feelings, promptings, etc.

- *Difficulty comprehending the word “spirit.”* To most of us, that word conjures up images of a ghost. In fact, the King James Version refers to the Spirit as “the Holy Ghost.”¹

¹ The KJV translators did not mean to suggest that the Spirit is some kind of ghost or demon. The word “ghost” meant “spirit” or “soul” in their day, the 1600s.

- *The lack of information regarding the Spirit's nature and work.* The Spirit's work has generally been "behind the scenes," especially in the Old Testament. The Spirit was very active in the early church, but was not visible like Jesus had been.

These difficulties should not deter us or discourage us from learning some basic truths about the Holy Spirit. Here are three of those basic truths:

FIRST BASIC TRUTH: THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

Not a person like you or me, but a person like God--a divine Being having the attributes of a person. The Greek word for "spirit" is interesting: *pneuma*. It originally meant "breath" or "wind." (A pneumatic tire has air in it; pneumonia is a disease of the breath.) The Greeks used this word to refer to spirits, because they are invisible like breath or wind.

The word *pneuma* is neuter gender, and originally referred to impersonal forces. But the Holy Spirit is never called an "it" in Scripture--the pronouns referring to the Spirit are all masculine. An example is John 16:13: "When HE, the Spirit of truth, has come, HE will guide you into all truth." Further Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Spirit is a person. He has all the attributes of a person:

- He can SPEAK. "The Holy Spirit said, 'Separate to me Barnabas and Saul'" (Acts 13:2).
- He can TEACH. John 14:26 reads, "...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things."
- He can GUIDE, HEAR, and DECLARE. John 16:13--"However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."
- He can WILL or CHOOSE. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."
- He can LOVE. "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30).

Moreover, many passages describe the Holy Spirit as being the recipient of actions which are applicable only to a person:

- He can be GRIEVED. Ephesians 4:30--"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."
- He can be LIED TO. "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?'" (Acts 5:3).
- He can be BLASPHEMED or SPOKEN AGAINST. Matthew 12:32 declares, "But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come."
- He can be RESISTED. "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you" (Acts 7:51).
- He can be INSULTED. Hebrews 10:29--"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Can you lie to electricity? Grieve magnetism? Insult a fluid?)

It is imperative to recognize this basic truth: The Holy Spirit is a divine Person, not a mere force or influence.

SECOND BASIC TRUTH: THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD (A MEMBER OF THE GODHEAD)

We can deduce from Scripture that God is a triune Being, a Trinity. (The word "trinity" is not in the Bible, but the concept is.) This means that there is one divine nature--one God essence or Godhead--but that divine nature is possessed equally and fully by three Persons, the Father, the Son or Word, and the Holy Spirit.²

We readily understand that God the Father and Jesus the Son are both "God." The Father is called God in multiple passages, one of which is Colossians 3:17. Jesus is called God in John 1:1--"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Less obvious is the fact that the Holy Spirit

² It is important to realize that the attributes of God are not shared or divided among the three Persons of the Godhead. Each member of the Trinity possesses the complete divine nature.

is God, but He is called God in at least one passage, Acts 5:3-4. In verse 3, Peter accuses Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit; and in the next verse, he says “You have not lied to men but TO GOD.” Paul affirmed that the Holy Spirit searches and understands the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit, then, is a divine Person fully equal to the Father and the Son and possessing fully the divine nature.

THIRD BASIC TRUTH: THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS DISTINCTIVE MISSIONS OR OPERATIONS

In fact, the best way to distinguish among the members of the Godhead is to look at their different functions or spheres of activity. In the Godhead, there is a divine “division of labor.” In general, the Father is the architect, the designer, and the originator; the Son is the builder; and the Spirit is the energizer and organizer. You can see this divine “division of labor” in the creation of the natural world: the Father willed and designed it; the Son made it; and the Spirit organized and energized it. This division of labor is also seen in the creation of the church: the Father willed and designed it; the Son built it (“Upon this rock I will build My church”), and the Spirit came on Pentecost and organized it by revelation of truth to the apostles.

FOURTH BASIC TRUTH: THE HOLY SPIRIT IS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BIBLE

Our main connection with the Spirit today is through the words He gave us in the Scriptures. Every time you read the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, you are reading words which were divinely and directly given to mankind by the Spirit. The Spirit was in the prophets (2 Peter 1:21), and He “guided the apostles into all truth” (John 16:13), and they wrote it down for us. Speaking of the blessings God intended for us through the sacrifice of Christ and the gospel, Paul said, “...God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we [apostles] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but [words] which the Holy Spirit

teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). So Bible study ought to be a joy, because we are reading a message from God through His Holy Spirit.

For another thing, the Bible clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, abides in us, to help us live the Christian life. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 reads, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” How does that indwelling occur? Galatians 3:2 answers: “This only I want to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a controversial subject, but it is certain that the Bible is the main MEDIUM through which the Spirit dwells in us and influences us.

SO WHAT BASIC TRUTHS HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

*The Holy Spirit is a person (a divine being with personality), just like the Father and the Son. He is not an impersonal force or a glorified “it.”

*The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead and fully possesses the Divine Nature along with the Father and the Son.

*The Holy Spirit has had certain divine missions or functions, mainly concerned with energizing, nurturing, and organizing God’s creation(s).

*The Holy Spirit miraculously guided the formation of the first-century church through inspiration of the New Testament.

*The Holy Spirit dwells in and works through our lives not miraculously but through the written word.

In the divine quest to get you and me to heaven, each member of the Godhead has done His part. The Father willed our salvation and devised a plan for it. The Son came to earth and paid the price to implement that plan and build the church, God’s divine institution with the saved as members. The Holy Spirit organized the church, nurtured it and guided it by inspiration until the church finally had the complete Bible as its guide. The Holy Spirit continues to bless and guide us

through the word of God, the Bible. Thanks be to God for His Holy Spirit in our lives! --John Temples