

The Personality *and* Divinity *of the* Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26; 3:22; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28; 2 Cor. 13:14.*

Memory Text: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (*Matthew 28:19*).

One doesn't have to read far in the Bible before one is confronted with the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 reads, “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (*NASB*); meanwhile, at the other end of the Bible, Revelation 22:17 reads, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Of course, between these two texts, throughout the pages of Scripture, the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit are revealed to us. This especially is true in the New Testament, where we are given many insights into the reality, purpose, and function of the Holy Spirit, particularly in regard to the plan of salvation.

This week we'll concentrate on one often misunderstood aspect of the Holy Spirit: His divinity. In other words, the Holy Spirit isn't just some impersonal force that emanates from God. Instead, He is God, one of the three Persons who make up the Godhead of the Christian faith. Let's take a look at this fundamental teaching of the Bible.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 1.*

The Triune God

The second of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reads, in part: “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 16. In other words, Adventists—along with millions of other Christians—believe in the triune nature of God; that is, there is one God (*Deut. 6:4*) who exists as three Persons. While that concept itself might not be simple, the biblical evidence for this truth is powerful and compelling. That we can’t fully understand something, particularly something about the very nature of God Himself, is hardly reason to reject it (*Job 11:7, 1 Cor. 13:12*).

How do each of the following texts point to the plurality of the Godhead?

Gen. 1:26

Gen. 3:22

Gen. 11:7

Isa. 6:8

John 1:1-3

John 8:58

“The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight. The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be ‘the express image of His person.’ . . . The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. 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, *Evangelism*, pp. 614, 615.

What analogies—such as a triangle or a three-pronged fork—can help someone understand the idea of how one God can be composed of three equal Persons? What other examples might help us better understand this deep truth?

Key Text: *1 Corinthians 2:10-16*

Teachers Aims:

1. To reaffirm that the Holy Spirit is a distinct and equal Member of the Trinity.
2. To show the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit and His work in our behalf.

Lesson Outline:

I. Plurality of God

- A. God refers to Himself as plural (*Gen. 1:26*).
- B. Moses refers to God as One but in the plural (*Duet. 6:4*).
- C. Jesus specifies the plurality of God (*Matt. 28:19*).

II. Divinity of the Holy Spirit

- A. The Holy Spirit is Omnipotent (*1 Cor. 2:10, 11*).
- B. Jesus glorified the Father, the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, and the Father glorifies them Both (*John 16:13-15*).
- C. Jesus glorified God in the flesh; the Holy Spirit glorifies God in our hearts and minds (*Rom. 8:14-17*).

III. Unique Personhood of the Holy Spirit

- A. For a witness to be valid, they must exist and be available to testify (*John 15:26*).
- B. The Holy Spirit refers to Himself in the first person (*Acts 13:2*).
- C. The Holy Spirit has a work that is uniquely His own (*John 14:26, 1 Cor. 12:4-11*).

Summary: The Holy Spirit has a mission as clear and distinct as the mission of Jesus. Jesus made it possible for us to be saved; the Holy Spirit works with us to better understand all that Jesus did and taught. We need both Jesus and the Holy Spirit to make it through this life and to the home Jesus is creating for us.

COMMENTARY

Introduction

The Holy Spirit, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, is a coequal member of the triune Godhead. He possesses

God the Holy Spirit: Part 1

Most people don't have a problem with the idea of the Father as God. After all, God is who the Father is. Even the idea of Jesus as God, as a fully Divine Being manifest in human form, though somewhat difficult to grasp, is, nevertheless, comprehensible. After all, an all-powerful God should be able to manifest Himself in human flesh if He so chooses to, right?

For many people, however, the concept of the Holy Spirit Himself as God is a much more difficult concept. It's much easier to think of the Holy Spirit not as God Himself but as some sort of impersonal force, some divine energy and power, such as gravity, that comes from God and pervades the world.

Yet, the Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit is Divine; that is, the Holy Spirit, just as the Father and as the Son, is one of the divine Personages of the Godhead.

How do the following texts help us understand the divine nature of the Holy Spirit?

Gen. 1:2

Matt. 1:20

Matt. 28:19

John 14:16

Acts 5:3, 4

Rom. 8:11

1 Cor. 2:10, 11

2 Cor. 3:17

Attributes of the Holy Spirit include truth (*John 16:13*), life (*Rom. 8:2*), and omnipotence (*1 Cor. 2:10, 11*)—attributes associated with divinity. Jesus, in Matthew 12:31, 32, says blasphemy spoken against Him can be forgiven but not blasphemy spoken against the Holy Spirit, a concept that doesn't make much sense if the Holy Spirit is anything less than God. Matthew 1:20, where Jesus is conceived in the womb of Mary through the Holy Spirit, is also a difficult text to understand if the Holy Spirit were not truly God. (*See also Gen. 1:2.*)

personality, has an infinite capacity to communicate, and operates in total unity with the Father and the Son.

I. The Triune God

God's truth about Himself and His essential qualities does not await our endorsement or comprehension in order to gain validity. "Indeed, let God be true, but every man a liar," as Paul declares in Romans 3:4. Scripture consistently mentions the Three Personages of the Godhead with an unequivocal inference of peership among them. (See *Matt. 28:19*; *2 Cor. 13:14*; *Gal. 4:4, 6*; *1 John 5:6, 7*.) Consider how jarringly incongruous if Matthew 28:19 read: "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Moses!" The only being whose name could be properly conjoined with the Father and the Son in such a context would be that of One equal to Them in essential nature and authority. God's triune Being reveals His inherently sociable, communicative, and interactive nature.

II. God the Holy Spirit

Christ's frequent reference to the Holy Spirit as "he," "who," and "whom" in John chapters 14–16, plainly attests to the personal identity of the Holy Spirit, and precludes the notion that the Spirit is a mere effluence, or exalted outshining, from the Godhead. Jesus declared that the Spirit would *dwell* in the believer (*John 14:16, 17*), would *guide* seekers into all truth (*16:13*), would *teach* all things (*14:26*), would *serve* as the Comforter (*14:26, KJV*), would *speak* and *remind* believers of Christ's words (*14:26*), would *testify* of Christ (*15:26*), would *convince* and *convict* human minds (*16:7, 8*), and would *show* things to come in conjunction with an expanding revelation of Christ (*16:13-15*). These are not the attributes and actions of an impersonal force, but of an intelligent, volitional Being.

"The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit is . . . of the highest importance from the practical standpoint. If we think of the Holy Spirit only as an impersonal power or influence, then our thought will constantly be, how can I get hold of and use the Holy Spirit; but if we think of Him in the Biblical way as a divine person, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely tender, then our thought will constantly be, 'How can the Holy Spirit get hold of and use me?' "—Alonzo J. Wearner, *Fundamentals of Bible Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 1945), p. 39.

III. The Unity of God

The Godhead's unity of purpose, mind, and character, but individuality among its Three Members, does not require any justification or explanation from created beings. Such fallen, mortal beings as ourselves only "know in part and prophesy in part," and "see in a mirror, dimly" (*1 Cor. 13:9, 12*). However, from the fact of God's

God the Holy Spirit: Part 2

“Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (*Acts 5:3, 4*).

In these two verses the Holy Ghost and God are used interchangeably. Thus, Peter here is equating the Holy Spirit and God, a powerful text that points to the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

How does 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28 help us understand the divinity of the Holy Spirit?

First Corinthians 12, as well as chapters 13 and 14, speaks of divine gifts or heavenly endowments made to members of the church. Interestingly enough, this discussion by the apostle Paul uses the same interchange that Peter made in speaking to Ananias and Sapphira. The Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and Lord and God, in verses 5, 6, and 28, are used interchangeably.

What did Jesus call the Representative He was going to send to His followers after His ascension? *John 14:16*.

Here Jesus addresses His Father as an equal and petitions a gift for His followers. For the word translated “another” here, the Greek is *allos*. It means “another of the same kind,” in contradistinction to *heteros*, which means “another of another kind.” Jesus intended to send Someone who is like Himself, and that is—Divine—to the disciples and succeeding generations of His followers. Previously, Jesus had related Himself to His Father. Now He relates Himself to the Spirit. Consequently, they are all alike, the Divine Persons of the Godhead.

Have you ever, as did Ananias and Sapphira, lied to the Holy Spirit? If so, what should you do now?

plurality and unity of being, we have a perfect example of the unity that should thrive among all created beings.

From the very beginning of this world's creation, God acted in the undisguised plurality of His Being, to unite in the work of fashioning this crown jewel of the cosmos:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*).

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (*vs. 2*). “And God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image . . .’” (*vs. 26*).

“In harmony with scriptural usage, the Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead. From this place onward, throughout the whole Scripture, the Spirit of God has the role of the Divine Agent of God in all creative acts, whether of the earth, of nature, of the church, of the new life, or of the new man. . . .

“This divine Agent has ever been present to assist in the work of creation and redemption, to reprove and strengthen wayward souls, to comfort the sorrowing, and to present the believer's prayers in an

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 3:22, Deuteronomy 6:4, Matthew 28:19, John 3:8, 16:13*

- 1 How do we know the Holy Spirit is a divine, personal Being, as are the Father and the Son? Why is it important to believe this?
- 2 Our views on the Holy Spirit stem from the concept of the Trinity as a unity of Three coeternal Beings. Most Christian denominations believe that this is true. What evidence for this belief do we have in the Bible?
- 3 Why do some people, both Christians and non-Christians, find the Trinity concept difficult to understand and believe in? Do you find it difficult? If so, why? How do you resolve your difficulties, and how would you explain the Trinity concept to others who may not believe or accept it?
- 4 Why is the idea of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force attractive to some people? What evidence does the Bible give us that this view is incorrect? How might our own way of speaking about the Holy Spirit contribute to the confusion?
- 5 What evidence is found in the Old Testament of the plural nature of God? How does the Old Testament stress that there is only one God? Why do these two concepts not contradict each other?

The Unity of God

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14).

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

How do these two verses help us see the divine nature of the Holy Spirit?

Christians have often been, and sometimes still are, accused of being polytheists—worshippers of more than one God. This is an understandable, but false, accusation. As Christians we admit there are three Persons in the Godhead, but “they are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 422. The Christian religion is not a belief in three separate gods; rather, it is a belief in one God who is manifested in three Persons working in perfect harmony with one another.

How is God presented by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4?

“Our God” in the text could justly be translated “our Gods.” Even with their intense monotheism, the Jews still used a plural name for God. In other words, this “one” God is depicted with a plural noun.

There has been a great deal of scholarly debate over the centuries regarding the meaning and significance of the plural for *God* here and in other places in Scripture. Explanations among both Jewish and Christian scholars, besides the plurality of the Godhead itself, have been given. As believers in the triune nature of God, we could see this use as *evidence* of our position but certainly not as proof. There is other scriptural evidence, more concrete, that affirms our understanding of the nature of God.

What hope can you find in the idea that all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in the plan of salvation?

acceptable form to God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 209.

In the work of Creation and redemption we see a consistent pattern of evidence that the Holy Spirit serves in voluntary subordination as the Third Member of the Godhead. In no way does this imply that the Spirit is a “junior partner” of the Trinity. Instead, He is a full possessor of all the characteristics and prerogatives of Deity. It is to exemplify an attitude of cooperation and self-transcendence that the Spirit takes this subordinate role. The Spirit’s infinite power enables Him to perform any work that advances Heaven’s cause and benefits us. Being God, nothing is impossible for the Spirit to achieve for, and through, cooperative lives (*see Eph. 1:17-19*). The

Witnessing

It’s pretty common nowadays to find products that provide three different functions under one label. For instance, biodegradable dishwashing liquid that (a) cleans the greasiest of dishes while (b) it manages to soften your hands and (c) protect the environment. An ATM (automated teller machine) card conveniently lets you withdraw cash, make deposits, and check on your account information all at the touch of a button. Talk about multipurpose!

The role of motherhood is a wonderful example of another type of multipurpose function that combines several distinct duties into one. Moms can be caregivers par excellence, no matter our ages or needs. They can be strong disciplinarians when they need to be and, more than anyone else, are meant to love and care for their children unconditionally.

Multipurpose gadgets and multitasking mothers, as wonderful as they make our lives, can only shadow what God does for us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He is our spiritual Comforter, whom Jesus Christ promised to send to our sinful planet to minister to those in need of the plan of salvation. Jesus promised to *never* leave His followers, and He kept that promise when He returned to heaven. In place of His physical Person, He sent back to earth His sweet Presence, embodied as the Holy Spirit, to comfort, minister, and impress all who will listen to open their hearts to His continuing love and forgiveness. *Faith* in the Word and in the promises of the Father and of the Son open the way for the Holy Spirit to reach hearts and minds.

Now think of all the people you know who desperately need comfort, unconditional love, and the promise of a better life. Plan ways in which you can reach out and offer the care and attention that is needed so badly. Remember, when you do this, you are being guided by the Holy Spirit and by God’s rich example of love and care.

Evidences of the Spirit’s Personality

Because Jesus had come to earth as a human being, in human form, it’s not hard to think of Him as a person with distinct character traits. In contrast, we oftentimes think of the Holy Spirit as an “it,” an impersonal entity or power. Yet, the Bible presents the Holy Spirit as a distinct personality, one that has intelligence (*John 14:26, 15:26, Rom. 8:16*), a will (*Acts 16:7, 1 Cor. 12:11*), and affections (*Eph. 4:30*).

The Bible also attributes to the Holy Spirit actions that reveal personality. He is said to speak expressly (*1 Tim. 4:1*), to send people on missions (*Acts 10:19, 20*), to prevent people from going places (*Acts 16:7*), to command people (*Acts 11:12*), to forbid actions (*Acts 16:6*), to call ministers of the gospel (*Acts 13:2*), to appoint them their spheres of duty (*Acts 20:28*), and to make intercession (*Rom. 8:26, 27*). These qualities and actions are more commonly identified with human personality as opposed to some mere power or influence.

How did Jesus refer to the Spirit? *John 15:26; 16:13, 14*. What do these texts tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit?

Although the word *Spirit* is a neuter noun in Greek, the Gospel writers refer to Him by using the masculine *he*. The Spirit refers to Himself by using the pronoun for the first person in *Acts 13:2—me*. Thus, it is appropriate to use *he* when speaking of the Spirit. The neuter gender for the Spirit, both in the original Greek and in English, has undoubtedly contributed to the popular use of *it* as have the symbols or emblems used in the Bible to present His nature and operations—fire, wind, oil, seal, and others.

What should it mean to you that the Holy Spirit isn’t just some divine force but God Himself? How is it more comforting to know that God the Holy Spirit, as opposed to an impersonal force, is intimately and closely working in our lives?

omnipresence of the Spirit enables Him to represent Christ everywhere and perform a simultaneous work of grace, guidance, and guardianship worldwide. (*See Eph. 2:18 and Rev. 22:17.*)

Consider how the unity among the Three Members of the Godhead and the richness of Their concerted benevolence toward all creation serve to root out of the universe anything that approaches a spirit of rivalry, contention, and lust for power.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When we see newborn babies, one of our first instincts is to try and decide who they look like. Share your experiences with your Sabbath School class. Did you look like your mom or your dad? Genesis 1:26 tells that we are made in God's image. In what ways do you reflect the Holy Spirit's presence and power? What would we look like without the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives?

Thought Questions:

1 As we read through the Bible, we meet God who is Three. The plan of salvation is portrayed through the different facets of their ministry to us: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What texts help you to understand the vast concept of Their unity, yet individuality of purpose and activity? (*See Job 33:4; Ps. 139:7-10; Matt. 12:31, 32; Acts 5:3, 4; 2 Cor. 13:14.*) How would you explain what you have discovered to a friend?

2 When Mom says to get a job done in a certain way, we are more likely to follow through than if a sibling had given us the same instructions. An actual quote from a recognized authority gives weight and power to discussions or directions. Read Matthew 28:19. Discuss the implications of Jesus' specific command to baptize in the name of all Three Members of the Godhead. Consider also John 3:5. Why do Jesus' disciples need the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives?

Application Question:

Isaiah meets God in the sanctuary (*Isa. 6:1-8*). He is changed and moved to action through the encounter. He becomes an agent of salvation through receiving the gift of prophecy. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28. Think of individuals in your congregation that display these spiritual gifts. Which spiritual gifts are evident in your life? How has the Holy Spirit made these gifts blessings for the growth of God's kingdom?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 615–617; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 209; vol. 6, pp. 1052, 1053; *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 530; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 585, 586.

“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, *Evangelism*, p. 616.

“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. ‘For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 617.

“The prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.”—Page 617.

“We are to co-operate with the three highest powers in heaven,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—and these powers will work through us, making us workers together with God.”—Page 617.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Have those in the class who are willing talk about their own personal experiences with the Holy Spirit and how He has changed their lives.
- 2 Trying to understand the idea of the plural nature of one God isn't always easy. There are limits to how much we can understand. Why, though, should these limits not be a barrier to our believing the Bible teaching on the triune nature of God? In other words, do we have to fully understand something in order to believe it? Defend your answer.