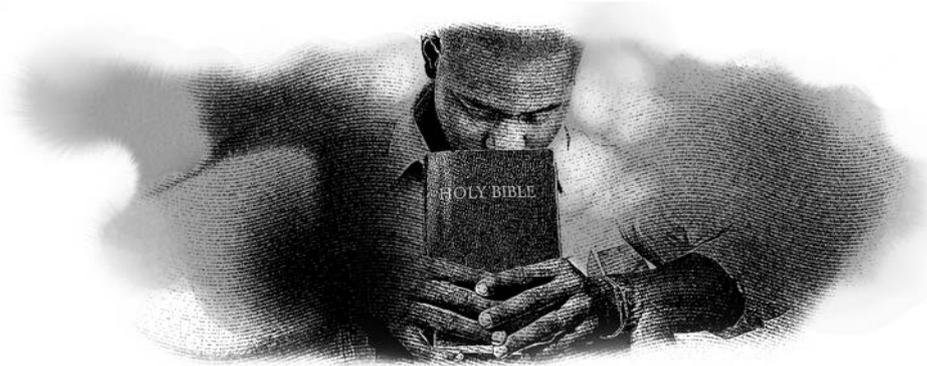


Who Is the Holy Spirit?



SABBATH—JANUARY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 16:13, 14; Romans 8:14–16; Romans 15:13; John 14:6; John 17:17; Romans 5:5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But the Father will send the Friend in my name to help you. The Friend is the Holy Spirit. He will teach you all things. He will remind you of everything I have said to you’ ” (John 14:26, NIV).

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES THE HOLY SPIRIT. But sometimes the Bible uses wording that makes it seem that the Holy Spirit is not a person. Some of this language includes word-pictures or symbols, such as wind or fire. As a result, some people have concluded that the Holy Spirit is not a real person at all. Instead, they view Him as a divine force or power. They think He is more like an electric current that flows into us and gives us strength. It is easy enough to find verses that seem to prove this view. The real question is, Are there equally strong verses in the Bible that show the Holy Spirit has the emotions (strong feelings), thoughts, and behavior of a person?

There are verses in the Bible that give us a more complete picture of who the Holy Spirit is. This week we will study these verses. They will help us to learn more about the personality of the Holy Spirit. This truth will help us to understand better the divine purpose of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. And this truth will help us to gain a deeper understanding of why it is important to believe that the Holy Spirit is a Person. After all, we must think the right thoughts about the Holy Spirit. Only then will we be able to give Him the love, worship, trust, and obedience that He deserves.

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (John 16:13, 14)

Read John 16:13, 14; John 15:26, 27; and John 14:17, 26. How does Jesus describe the personality of the Holy Spirit in these verses? What does it mean to you that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a Helper or Comforter (*parakletos* in Greek)?

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit guides, speaks, hears, discloses (makes truth known), and glorifies (John 16:13, 14, NASB). The Holy Spirit also teaches and reminds us (John 14:26, NIV). He lives in us (John 14:17, NIV); He testifies (John 15:24, 26, NIV); and He convicts (John 16:8, NIV). These actions sound more like the actions of an independent Person who thinks for Himself. They do not sound like the actions of a force that has no feelings.

Read John 14:16–18. How would Jesus' promise come true? What does it mean that the disciples would not be left alone?

Jesus cares for His followers. He would not leave His disciples as orphans. He promises to send the Holy Spirit. Jesus says here that He will send “another Helper” (NKJV) or “Comforter.” The words that Jesus uses here are very important. He promises to send *another* helper. Not a *different* one. The Greek word for “another” is *allos*. In the Greek language of the New Testament, *allos* means that Christ will send another Comforter. This Comforter is a separate Person. But He has the same character¹ as God. In other words, Jesus promises to send One *like Himself*. This Person is One who will take Jesus' place. The Comforter is One who will continue to do Christ's work in us. The Spirit will be Christ's representative.

This work of the Holy Spirit is the work of a helper or comforter. The Greek word that the Bible uses here for “helper” or “comforter” is *parakletos* (John 14:16). It describes someone who is called to give us support and to help us as a person would. So, just as Jesus is a Person, the Holy Spirit is also a Person. The Bible supports this idea by describing the behavior of the Holy Spirit in a personal way (read John 14:26; John 15:26; Acts 15:28; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and 1 Timothy 4:1).

Why is it comforting to know that the Holy Spirit is a personality instead of a force?

DEFINITIONS

1. character—who someone is; the thoughts, feelings, and actions make up a person's character.

WHAT MAKES THE HOLY SPIRIT A PERSON? PART 1 (Romans 8:14–16)

Read the following verses: Romans 8:14–16, 27; Romans 15:30; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Acts 8:29; Acts 10:19, 20; and Acts 28:25. Are these verses talking about a force with no personality? Why, or why not?

Can an impersonal (not a person) force step in and act as a go-between before God on our behalf (for us)? Does an impersonal spirit or force have the power to show us things about God? Does an impersonal force have the power to speak? All the verses we just read make much more sense if we believe the Holy Spirit is a Person and not an impersonal force.

Read the following verses: Ephesians 4:30; Acts 5:3, 9; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and Romans 15:30. How do these verses show that the Holy Spirit feels, thinks, and behaves like a real Person?

A personality is made up of three things: knowledge (or understanding), feeling, and will.² For example, only a person can feel sorrow. Only a person can be deceived (tricked) and lied to. Only a person has the ability to choose to do what he or she wants. (Having a will to freely choose to do what one wants is perhaps one of the most important parts of having a personality.) And only a person has the power to love. After all, true love is not impersonal. Love comes with a very personal touch.

All of these parts of a personality show that the Holy Spirit knows who He is. He has a will of His own. And He freely chooses to act on His thoughts. He is able to love. He is not a flow of power. He is not a force with no personality. Instead, the Holy Spirit is spoken of in these personal ways in the Bible. Why? It is because God Himself is a personal God. And the Holy Spirit is God.

“The Holy Spirit has a personality. But suppose He did not. Then He could not witness to us and with us that we are the children of God. He also must be a Divine Person. But, again, suppose if He were not. Then He could not search out the secrets hidden in the mind of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*,³ page 617.

The Bible views the Holy Spirit as a Person. How does this view help define and shape our relationship with Him? What would be different if the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal power instead of God Himself?



The Holy Spirit feels sorrow the way one of us feels sorrow.

DEFINITIONS

2. will—a person's choice or desire to do something in a particular situation.

3. Evangelism—the act of going from place to place to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

WHAT MAKES THE HOLY SPIRIT A PERSON? PART 2 (Romans 15:13)



Jesus became like us. He appeared to us in human form. The Spirit does not have a body. But He is also a Person.

We face a challenge in understanding who the Holy Spirit is. It is hard to imagine Him as a Person. He cannot be seen or felt or touched. We can imagine God as a Father with a body that can be seen or felt or touched (if not by our fallen eyes and hands, then certainly by His Son's). Many also have a clear picture of Jesus from the Gospels.⁴ He took our human nature (our sinful desires). He appeared to us in human form.

The Holy Spirit, however, is shown in a very different way. He has no physical body. So, He seems to be One we cannot touch. For this reason, He seems to be harder to understand than the Father and the Son.

As a result, some conclude that the Holy Spirit is only an impersonal power. But so far, we have seen that this idea does not really tell the truth about the Holy Spirit. There are statements in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. But suppose the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal force or power. Then these statements in the Bible would make no sense.

Carefully read Romans 15:13 and 1 Corinthians 2:4. Try replacing the meaning or words used for the Holy Spirit with the impersonal word *power*. What happens to the meaning? Do these verses still make sense? Why do these verses make sense only if the Holy Spirit is truly a Person?

Acts 15:28 begins by declaring, “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’ ” (NASB). This verse would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were only a power or an impersonal force. The verse instead points to another personal Being. So, as the Father and Son are both personal Beings, so is the Spirit.

Believers also are baptized “ ‘in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ ” (Matthew 28:19, NASB). But suppose we think of the first Two who are mentioned (the Father and Son) as Persons, but not the Third (the Spirit). That view does not make the best sense. Instead, we must realize all Three are part of the same One name in whom we are baptized. This is why the Holy Spirit is shown here to be equal to God the Father and God the Son.

Ellen G. White wisely states, “There are Three Living Persons of the heavenly Trio; . . . the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”—Adapted from *Evangelism*, page 615. So, she, too, is very clear about the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

DEFINITIONS

4. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH (John 14:6)

Read John 14:6 and John 17:17. What is the meaning of *truth* in these verses?

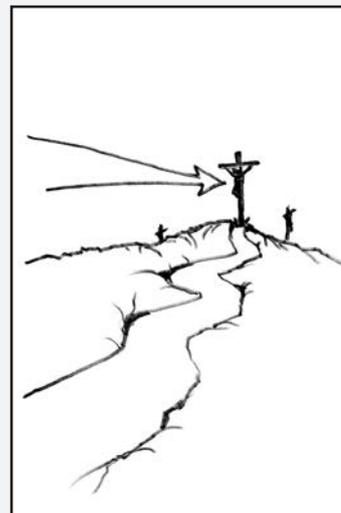
In the Gospel of John, the word *truth* is an important one. Our understanding of truth today often is unclear. And it is hard to explain and identify. It is based more on ideas of what is right than on putting those ideas into practice. In the Western world, truth has been shaped by Greek thinkers. They lived hundreds and hundreds of years ago. But in the Bible, and clearly in John's Gospel, truth has a personal and exact meaning: Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). God's Written Word (the Bible) is truthful (compare⁵ with John 17:17 and Psalm 119:142). And God's truth is made known to us in the highest and most powerful way in the Person of Jesus Christ. God has made Himself known to us through Jesus. The Bible makes this knowledge very clear to us.

Read John 15:26 and John 16:13. How does the Holy Spirit act or serve as “the Spirit of truth”?

John 16:13 tells us that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. And the Spirit leads us into all truth by pointing us to Jesus Christ. For example, the Spirit helps us to remember what Jesus has said (John 15:26) and done for us. The truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, then, is very personal. The Spirit lifts up Jesus. And the Spirit leads us into a living and faithful relationship with Jesus. Jesus talked about the Spirit, too, with the woman of Samaria. He said that God must be worshiped “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We are also to ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is because He will lead us to Jesus. And Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6, NIV).

Truth in the Bible is not an unclear theory (unproved idea). Truth involves our having a deeply personal and faithful relationship with our Creator and Redeemer (Savior). Our Creator is called the “God of truth” (compare Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 31:5). So, it is right to call the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; John 16:13). After all, the Spirit is sent to us from God the Father (John 15:26). And where the Spirit comes from shows His personal character. It also shows that He is divine.

What does the idea that truth is a Person mean to you? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



The Spirit leads us into all truth by pointing us to Jesus.

DEFINITIONS

5. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

WHY DOES IT MATTER? (Romans 5:5)



If we think of the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person, we will ask, *How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?*

Does the Holy Spirit have a personality? This question is very important. It is a question that affects every part of our spiritual lives in very real and practical (useful) ways.

Suppose we think of the Holy Spirit only as a mysterious divine power. Then our thoughts will be, *How can I have more of the Holy Spirit as God has planned?* But suppose we think of the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person. Then we will ask, *How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?* The clear point is, Do you want to have the Holy Spirit? Or do you want the Holy Spirit to have you? Do you oppose His influence? Or are you willing to follow Him in joyful obedience (read Romans 8:12–14 and Galatians 5:18–24)? Do you want to use the Holy Spirit according to your plans? Or do you rely on Him? Do you let Him help you become more like Jesus Christ? Do you trust Him to do what He has in mind for you? Do you take seriously the fact that “your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?” And are you willing to glorify God with how you live?

Read Romans 5:5 and Ephesians 2:18, 19. In these verses, how are the Holy Spirit and God’s love connected? What effect does that love have on you personally and on the church as a whole?

Only persons can freely choose to cooperate with one another. We are invited, then, to work together with the Holy Spirit while He leads and changes us personally and changes God’s church as a whole. We need to accept the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Three-in-One Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). But suppose we did not. Then it would be easier for us to ignore Him. And it would be easier to harden our hearts to His invitation. And we might also harden our hearts against His life-changing influence. We must always remember that we are fallen, sin-damaged beings. We are always in need of God’s life-changing grace.⁶ So, the last thing we need to do is ignore the prompting (reminding) of the Holy Spirit in our lives to do what is right. Truly, we need to give more of ourselves to Him.

“We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 672. What do you think Ellen G. White meant by these words? How can the Holy Spirit use us? (Read Philippians 2:13.)

DEFINITIONS

6. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read what Ellen G. White has to say about the Holy Spirit in *The Desire of Ages*, pages 669–672. Also read *Evangelism*, pages 613–617.

Jesus gives His disciples their calling and work in Matthew 18:20. Notice Jesus told His followers to baptize disciples in the “name” (*singular* [meaning one]) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He did not say “names” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but just “name,” from the Greek word *onoma*. This wording is more powerful proof that the God we worship is a Three-in-One God. (“ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ ” [Deuteronomy 6:4, NKJV]).

This week’s lesson made an important point. No one questions that the Father and the Son are Persons and have personalities. So, why should anyone question the personality and Personhood of the Holy Spirit? In the Bible, we have the love, care, and comfort of God Himself working in us and through us. That is who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. How much nicer it is to know that this power is a Person, just as much as the Father and Jesus are. Yes, it is hard to understand fully. But at the same time, we cannot fully understand something as basic as light or wind. So then, it makes sense that we shall not be able to understand fully who the Holy Spirit is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s question about truth being a Person, Jesus Christ. What does this idea mean? Why would Jesus be the Truth? How do we understand “truth” as a Person instead of as an idea or a theory?
- 2 Ellen G. White wrote, “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit is as much a person as God. The Holy Spirit is walking through these grounds.”—Adapted from *Evangelism*, page 616. What does this statement tell us about how real the Holy Spirit is?
- 3 Go back over some of the things we learned this week that make the Holy Spirit a Person. Which things are most comforting to you? Which thing about Him means the most to you? Share in class why you chose what you did.
- 4 What do you better relate to—an impersonal force or a personality? What does your answer teach you about your faith and yourself?