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The Personality of the Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Lesson 4

Read for This Week's Study: John 16:13, 14; Rom. 8:14– 16; Rom. 15:13; John 14:6; John 17:17; Rom. 5:5.

Memory Text: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26, NASB).

Because the Holy Spirit is occasionally depicted in the Bible in impersonal terms, such as wind or fire, some have concluded that He is impersonal, a type of divine power. In their view, He is more like an electric current that empowers us rather than existing as a personal Being. But the question is not whether some passages can be brought forward that denote more impersonal operations or influences of the Holy Spirit. The question is whether there are numerous portions of Scripture that positively do establish His personality.

There are texts, and we need to take them into consideration in order to gain a more complete picture of who the Holy Spirit is.

This week we will learn more about the personality of the Holy Spirit as He is described in Scripture. This truth will help us better understand the role of God's divine Spirit in our lives. And it will help us to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of the belief in the personality of the Holy Spirit for our spiritual life. Only when we entertain right thoughts about Him can we render to Him that love, reverence, confidence, and submission that are due to Him.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 28.

Jesus' Description of the Holy Spirit

Read John 16:13, 14; John 15:26, 27; and John 14:17, 26. What very personal characteristics does Jesus attribute to the Holy Spirit in these passages? What does it mean to you that Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as a Helper or Comforter (*parakletos*)?

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit guides, speaks, hears, discloses, and glorifies (John 16:13, 14, NASB). The Holy Spirit also teaches and reminds us (John 14:26). He dwells in us (John 14:17), He testifies (John 15:24, 26), and He convicts (John 16:8). These sound more like the actions of a sovereign personality than they do an impersonal force.

Read John 14:16–18. How would Jesus' promise be fulfilled? How are the disciples not left alone?

Jesus cares for His followers. He would not leave His disciples as orphans. He promised to send the Holy Spirit. Jesus here specifically says that He will send "another helper" or "comforter." The words that Jesus uses here are significant. 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* indicates that Christ will send another comforter who is numerically distinct but is of the same character; that is, who is similar to Himself. In other words, Jesus promises One *like Himself*, One who will take His place, One who will continue to do His work in us, and who is His representative.

This work of the Holy Spirit is the work of a helper or comforter. The Bible here uses the Greek word *parakletos (John 14:16)* to describe someone who is called upon for support, for assistance—someone called to our aid. Just as Jesus is a Person, the Holy Spirit is also personal. This idea is supported by the fact that personal attributes are often ascribed to the Holy Spirit (*see John 14:26, 15:26, Acts 15:28, Rom. 8:26, 1 Cor. 12:11, 1 Tim. 4:1*).

Why is it so much more *comforting* to know that the Holy Spirit is a personality instead of a mere force?

Personal Aspects of the Holy Spirit: Part 1

As you read the following texts, ask yourself if they sound as if they are talking about an impersonal force or about a divine Person. Rom. 8:14–16, 27; 15:30; 1 Cor. 2:10; Acts 8:29; 10:19, 20; 28:25.

Can an impersonal force intercede in our behalf? Does an impersonal spirit or power have the ability to reveal to us things about God? Does an impersonal influence have the ability to speak? All those biblical statements make much more sense if the Holy Spirit is a personal being as opposed to some impersonal force.

Read the following texts. What personal attributes are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in these passages? *Eph. 4:30; Acts 5:3, 9; 1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 15:30.*

The distinctive characteristics of personality are knowledge (or understanding), feeling, and will. Only a personal being can be grieved. Only a personal being can be deceived and lied to. Only a personal being has the ability to choose as he wills and has his own volition. The will is perhaps one of the most distinctive elements and characteristics in any personality. And only a personal being has the capacity to love. True love is not conceivable in an abstract and impersonal manner. Love comes with a very personal touch. These predicates of personality indicate that the Holy Spirit is a self-conscious, self-knowing, selfwilling, and self-determining Being, capable of love. He is not a shadowy effluence or an impersonal essence. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in these personal ways because God Himself is a personal God.

"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."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 617.

How does the biblical perspective that the Holy Spirit has characteristics of a personality impact our relationship with Him? What would be different if the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal power as opposed to God Himself?

Personal Aspects of the Holy Spirit: Part 2

A challenge we face in understanding the Holy Spirit is that we can imagine God as a Father in a somewhat tangible way. Many also have a concrete picture of Jesus, as He is described in the Gospels. He took our human nature and appeared to us in human form.

The Holy Spirit, however, is presented in a very different manner. He is seemingly impalpable, much harder to comprehend than are the Father and the Son.

Hence, some draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is only an impersonal power. As we have seen so far, that idea doesn't really do justice to the nature of the Holy Spirit. In fact, there are statements in the Bible that would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were just an impersonal force or (divine) power.

Carefully read the following two passages and see if they make sense if you replace the reference to the Holy Spirit with the impersonal word *power*. Why do these texts make sense only if the Holy Spirit is, indeed, a Person?

Rom. 15:13	 	
1 Cor. 2:4	 	

The statement of the apostles that " 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' " (*Acts 15:28, NASB*) would be absurd if the Holy Spirit were only a power or an impersonal influence. The statement instead indicates another personal Being, much the same as both the Father and Son are personal Beings.

Furthermore, how can believers be baptized " 'in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' " (*Matt. 28:19, NASB*) if the first two who are mentioned are Persons but the third mentioned is not? That doesn't make the best sense. Instead, all three are mentioned as being part of the same one name in whom we are baptized. Thus, the Holy Spirit is revealed here to be on the same level as God the Father and God the Son.

Ellen G. White has perceptively stated that "there are three living persons of the heavenly trio . . . the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615. She, too, is very clear about the existent personality of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth

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

In the Gospel of John, the word *truth* is a key term. Our contemporary understanding of truth often is very abstract and theoretical. In the Western world it has been shaped by Greek philosophy. However, in the Bible, and particularly in John's Gospel, truth carries a rather personal and specific meaning: Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). While God's Written Word is truthful (compare with John 17:17, Ps. 119:142), God's truth is revealed in a supreme way in the Person of Jesus Christ. A true knowledge of God is given to us in Jesus, of whom the Scriptures speak, because God has revealed Himself through Him.

Read John 15:26 and 16:13. What function does the Holy Spirit have as the Spirit of truth?

In John 16:13, we are told that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. He does this by pointing to Jesus Christ and by helping us to remember what Jesus has said (John 15:26) and done for us. The truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us is very personal: He lifts up Jesus and leads us into a living and faithful relationship with Him. When Jesus talked with the woman of Samaria. He said that God must be worshiped in spirit and truth (John 4:24). When we ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to Jesus, who is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Truth in the Bible is no abstract thing or theory, such as often appears in philosophy. Truth encompasses a deeply personal and faithful relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, who is called "the God of all truth" (compare with Deut. 32:4, Ps. 31:5). Thus, the Holy Spirit is aptly called the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17, NASB; 16:13, NASB), who is sent to us from God the Father (John 15:26), indicating not only His personal character but also His divinity.

We do tend to think of truth in terms of propositions, such as the logical concept known as modus ponens. "If A, then B. A, therefore B." And no question, a lot of what we understand as truth we understand as propositions. How, though, do you understand the idea of truth as a Person? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Why Does It Matter?

The question of the personality of the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance, and it has highly practical implications. "If He is a divine person, and we think of Him as an impersonal influence, we are robbing a divine person of the deference, honor, and love that is His due." -LeRoy Edwin Froom, The Coming of the Comforter (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 40.

If we think of the Holy Spirit only as a mysterious divine power, our thoughts will be: How can I have more of the Holy Spirit? But if we think of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person, we will ask: How can the Holy Spirit have more of me? The decisive point is: Do you want to possess the Holy Spirit, or do you want the Holy Spirit to possess you? Do you resist His influence, or are you willing to follow Him in joyful obedience (see Rom. 8:12-14, Gal. 5:18-24)? Do you want to use the Holy Spirit according to your plans, or do you rely on Him so that He can enable you to become more like Jesus Christ and do what He has in mind for you? Do you take seriously the fact that "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God" (1 Cor. 6:19, NASB), and are you willing to glorify God with how you live?

Read Romans 5:5 and Ephesians 2:18, 19. How are the Holy Spirit and God's love connected? What impact does that have on you personally and on the church?

People consciously choose to cooperate with one another. We are invited to work together with the Holy Spirit, while He leads and transforms us personally and God's church corporately. If we do not accept the Holy Spirit as a Person of the triune Godhead, it will be easier for us to ignore Him, to deafen our ears to His invitation, and to harden our hearts against His life-changing influence. And because we are fallen, sin-damaged beings in need of God's transforming grace, the last thing we need to do is ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If anything, we need to give more of ourselves to Him. Thus, in our acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person who wants to use us, God stands at the center of our Christian experience.

"We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us."—The Desire of Ages, p. 672. What do you think Ellen G. White meant by that? How can the Holy Spirit use us? (See Phil. 2:13.)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled," pp. 669–672, in *The Desire of Ages*, where she speaks about the Holy Spirit. Also read "Dealing With False Science, Cults, Isms, and Secret Societies," pp. 613–617, in *Evangelism*.

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:18–20, NKJV). Notice, as Jesus gave them their calling and work, He said to baptize disciples in the "name," singular, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He didn't say "names" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but just "name" (Greek onoma). This is more powerful proof of the triune nature of our One God (" 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!' " [Deut. 6:4, NKJV]). As this week's lesson has already pointed out, no one questions the personality of the Father and the Son: thus, why should anyone do that with the personality and personhood of the Holy Spirit? According to the Bible, we have the loving, caring, and comforting presence of God Himself working in us and through us. That's who the Holv Spirit is and what He does. And how much nicer it is to know that this abiding presence is a Person, just as much as the Father and Jesus are. Yes, it's hard to fully understand. But so what? If we can't fully understand the nature of something as basic as light or wind, how much more so will we not be able to fully understand the nature of the Holy Spirit Himself?

Discussion Questions:

1 In class, go over your answer to Wednesday's question about truth being a Person, Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Why would Jesus be the Truth? How do we understand "truth" that way—instead of seeing it merely as precepts or propositions?

2 Ellen G. White wrote: "We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds."—*Evangelism*, p. 616. What does this tell us about the reality and presence of the Holy Spirit?

3 Go back over some of the traits and characteristics of the Holy Spirit that we have seen this week. Which ones are especially comforting to you? Which one means the most to you? Share in class why you chose what you did.

What can you better relate to, an impersonal force or a personality? What are the implications of your answer?

INSIDE Story

Finding God's Plan: Part 2

Roza continued attending the Seventh-day Adventist church, and she became convinced that this was where God wanted her to be. After attending the church for several months, Roza asked to be baptized.

Her parents were angry when she told them about her decision. For the first time in her life, her father hit her. And her mother demanded that she leave the house.

Roza packed a few clothes and her school textbooks and left her parents' home. She went to stay with an Adventist family who lived nearby. Two weeks later Roza's mother sent her sister to ask her to return home.

She was permitted to sleep in her own bed, but her parents no longer supported her financially. A scholarship paid her school tuition, but Roza took a job cleaning the church to pay for food and other necessities. She spent most of her time in class and studying in the school library, going home only to sleep. Roza managed to finish college on her own.

Roza knew that her mother was worried about her. "How will you ever find a husband?" she asked. Roza knew her mother had a point, because there weren't many Adventists in Poland. But she claimed God's promises to provide for her in every way.

While Roza was preparing for baptism, she met Krystov [Chris-toff], a young man who lived in another city and also was planning to be baptized. The two began writing to each other, and in time they began dating. Eventually, they were married.

Krystov entered the ministry, and Roza began her career as a teacher. Her family saw that the couple was happy in their faith and in their work, and they have reconciled with their daughter. Roza hopes that one day soon her parents will find the joy in Jesus that she and Krystov know.

Roza is grateful to God for leading her to the Savior through the influence of her grandmother, a Bible lecture brochure, and a Bible camp filled with friendly youth who welcomed her.

This quarter you can help reach many more people for Jesus in Poland through your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Part of this quarter's offering will fund live television programs aimed specifically toward children and youth on Hope Channel Poland. Thank you for your support through the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Did you know that you don't have to wait until the last Sabbath of the quarter to give to this special offering? Give online now at our secure Web site: giving.adventistmission .org (choose "13th Sabbath Offering" from the pull-down fund menu). Thank you!

The Lesson in Brief

Key Texts: John 14:16–18, 16:5–15

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize the importance of understanding that the Holy Spirit is a divine Personality, not merely a force proceeding from the Father.

Feel: Experience a deeper appreciation of, and dependence on, the Holy Spirit's ministry in daily living.

Do: Develop sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit and a more complete openness to responding to His leading.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Holy Spirit Is Just as Much a Divine Person as Are the Father and the Son.

A What attributes of personality does the Bible ascribe to the Holy Spirit?

B How do you define "personhood"? What makes a person a person? How do the qualities of the Holy Spirit, found in the Bible, give evidence of these traits?

II. Feel: The Holy Spirit Longs to Fill Each Believer.

A Why is it so important to recognize that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead and as much a divine Personality as are the Father and the Son?

B How do you feel knowing that Jesus has not left us orphans but longs to be personally present with us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

III. Do: The Holy Spirit Longs to Reveal Jesus More Fully.

A The highest delight and greatest joy of the Holy Spirit is to "testify" of Jesus in our lives. Determine to set aside time each day to read some portion of the Gospels in order to give the Spirit space to glorify Jesus in your life. What have you found most helpful in your own spiritual life to allow you time to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?

B What specific experiences could you share with the class regarding times in which the Holy Spirit has revealed God's love? How have they been specifically meaningful to you?

Summary: When we open our hearts to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, realizing that He is the personal Representative of Christ, the Third Person of the Godhead, He will reveal Jesus to us in all of His beauty and glorify the living Christ in our lives.

Learning Cycle

▶**STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: John 16:7

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Holy Spirit is not limited by time or place. Whenever we need Him, He is there. Wherever we go in Christ's name, He will be there, guiding, counseling, encouraging, strengthening, and inspiring us with hope. As we grasp the reality of the Spirit's daily, continual presence, our hearts will be overjoyed.

Just for Teachers: This week's lesson unfolds the personality of the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture. Some want to deny that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead. They believe that the Holy Spirit is a force or an essence that proceeds from the Father, not a distinct Being and divine Personality.

In our study this week, we will systematically review the Bible passages that clearly demonstrate both the divine nature and Personhood of the Holy Spirit. Three basics of personality are a mind that reasons, a will that chooses, and speech that communicates. The Holy Spirit possesses all three. We will examine the first two in more depth in this lesson.

Opening Discussion: When you think of the Holy Spirit, what do you think of? How clear is your own thinking on the nature, role, and ministry of the Holy Spirit? It certainly is much easier to think of the Father and Son as divine Personalities than it is to think of the Holy Spirit as such.

We often equate visibility with personhood. It is difficult to imagine a person who is invisible. The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Infinite things are difficult for the human mind to comprehend; but just because we do not fully understand something does not mean that the thing we do not fully understand does not exist.

Questions for Discussion:

• Why is understanding the nature of the Holy Spirit so important?

2 Why do God's people need the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives?

3 What can we learn from Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, 14?

▶**STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: When we approach divine mysteries, it is important

to discover what the Bible says and to be willing to leave unanswered what it does not say. In this week's lesson, we will focus on what the Bible teaches on the divine Personality of the Holy Spirit, finding encouragement and strength for our lives today.

Bible Commentary

I. "Called to One's Side": The Holy Spirit as Helper and Comforter (*Review John 14–16 with the class.*)

In Jesus' discussion of the Holy Spirit in John 14–16, He uses the term "'Helper'" (*NKJV*) or "Comforter" (*KJV*) on four separate occasions (*John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7*). The Greek term used in these passages is *paraklētos*, which literally means " called to one's side,' i.e., to one's aid."—*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, s.v. "parakletos," accessed March 29, 2016, https://www.blueletterbible.org/search /Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=VT0000499. In an ancient court of law, when someone was tried, this person was assigned a *paraklētos*, who would come to this person's aid and provide for the needs of this person. (Ibid.) These needs might be physical, such as the need for food, blankets, or water. Additionally, they might be emotional or psychological needs, such as the need for a defense or an advocate when the charges were brought forward in court.

What an image to use in order to describe the Holy Spirit: One who comes alongside of us to meet our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs! There is never a situation that we face as God's children when He is not there. There is never an experience with which we are confronted that He is incapable of handling. Our divine Helper is always there, ready to help in our times of need.

Consider This: What is the original Greek term for Holy Spirit that is used in John 14:16, and what does that literally mean? How does its meaning help us understand more fully the concept of the Holy Spirit as both Helper and Comforter? How does He come to our aid? What needs does He fulfill?

II. The Person of the Holy Spirit (*Review Romans 8:27 and 1 Corinthians 12:11 with the class.*)

The apostle Paul uses two amazing terms to describe the Holy Spirit's divine Personhood: "mind" and "will." In Romans 8:27, Paul speaks of the "mind of the Spirit" (*NKJV*). In 1 Corinthians 12:11, he points out that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to each believer individually "as He wills."

The mind and the will are two unique functions of personhood. Let's look more closely at the mind and the will in the Bible, as presented in the context of human believers and Christ, to infer more fully what it means for the Holy Spirit to be endowed with both.

The mind is the center of thought. It is here that reason, conscience, and judgment influence decisions. The Bible uses the word *mind* to embody concepts of holiness, unity, and soundness of mind—qualities believers are urged to aspire to and pray for. For example, the Bible tells us we may have the mind of Christ (*Phil. 2:5, 1 Cor. 2:16*), which is to say, His holy character. And when speaking of the need for unity among believers, the Bible urges us to be of the "same mind" (*Rom. 12:16, Phil. 4:2*) and "one mind" (*2 Cor. 13:11*). Coming into Christ's presence imparts soundness of mind, as the story of the demoniac powerfully illustrates. Subsequently, when the demons are cast out, the demoniac is found to be in his "right mind" (*Mark 5:15, Luke 8:35*), a phrase that also can be translated from the Greek to mean "to be of sound mind."—*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words,* s.v. "sophroneo," accessed March 29, 2016, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon /Lexicon.cfm?strongs=G4993&t=KJV.

Just as the endowment of a mind is a defining characteristic of personhood for both the human and the divine, so is the will. Animals have minds. But the will, or the ability to make rational choices, lifts us above the animal creation. Being endowed with a will reflects part of what it means to be fashioned in the image of God. We are not merely creatures, propelled by instinct and driven by biological desires. God has given each of us the capacity to make moral choices through the right exercise of the will. Ellen G. White states it succinctly: "The will is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or choice. Every human being possessed of reason has power to choose the right. In every experience of life, God's word to us is, 'Choose you this day whom ye will serve.' Joshua 24:15. Every one may place his will on the side of the will of God, may choose to obey Him, and by thus linking himself with divine agencies, he may stand where nothing can force him to do evil."—*Education,* p. 289. It is through the right exercise of the will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that a godly character is developed.

Because the Holy Spirit has both a divine mind that thinks and reasons and a divine will that chooses, He must, by very definition, be a divine Person. He is not merely a force that proceeds from the Father, one aspect of God's personality. He is a separate, distinct Personality. The Holy Spirit thinks, reasons, makes decisions, and chooses. He is as much a real and divine Personality as are the Father and the Son.

Consider This: Define the characteristics of personhood and why, based on these criteria, the Holy Spirit—mysterious though He may be—fulfills the definition of personhood.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Lead your class into a practical discussion of how the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of God's Word and how Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life'" (John 14:6, NKJV). If Jesus is "truth," what does He mean when He says to His disciples that the Holy Spirit will lead them into "tall truth" (John 16:13)?

Thought/Application Questions:

• When we seek the Holy Spirit to be in our midst, we are not seeking some cosmic force to guide us. When we seek guidance from the Holy Spirit, we are not hoping for a mystical presence to lead us to some inner light. We are asking the God of the universe to send the Third Person of the Godhead to give us the support we need. Why does the Holy Spirit seem so mysterious at times? How can He become more real in our lives?

What can we do as individuals to be more sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

3 What practical things can we do to hear the voice of God speaking through the Holy Spirit as we read God's Word?

▶STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Holy Spirit is a powerful Ally in overcoming sin and enabling us to live joyful and abundant Christian lives. The Holy Spirit is available to strengthen us as we face temptation, to encourage us in times of discouragement, and to guide us in times of decision. As we give the Holy Spirit permission to fill our lives with His divine presence, we will live life to the fullest rather than struggling in our own strength against the wiles of the evil one and living lives of frustrated defeat. We will rejoice in the victories that the Holy Spirit gives.

Activities:

• Ask your class to share the most significant thought they will take away from this week's lesson.

2 Discuss with your class what it means to them personally that the Holy Spirit is our divine *parakletos*.

8 Invite your class to share ways they have found to hear the Spirit's voice as they have meditated on the Word and works of God.