

# 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*

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*Gen. 3:22*

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*Gen. 11:7*

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*Isa. 6:8*

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*John 1:1-3*

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*John 8:58*

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“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?**

## 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*

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*Matt. 1:20*

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*Matt. 28:19*

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*John 14:16*

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*Acts 5:3, 4*

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*Rom. 8:11*

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*1 Cor. 2:10, 11*

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*2 Cor. 3:17*

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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.*)

## 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?

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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*.

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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?**

## 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?

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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?

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“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?**

## 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?

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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?**

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**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:**

- ❶ 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.
- ❷ 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.

# The Sabbath Suit

Charlotte Ishkanian

Manuel Mombassa was asked to be Sabbath School superintendent in his church in Mozambique. He was glad to serve, but he had a problem: In Mozambique, as in much of Africa, a man who stands before the church must wear a suit coat and tie. Mombassa had neither, and the recent civil war made it difficult to find a coat at any price. So Mombassa borrowed his uncle's suit and tie each Sabbath.

One week the mission president was coming, and Mombassa spent extra time on his Sabbath School presentation. But on Wednesday his uncle told him that he was leaving town, taking his suit with him. "Tell your God to send you a coat and tie," his uncle chuckled.

Mombassa had no idea where to find a coat and tie, but he *had* to be on the platform that Sabbath. He put his problem at the feet of Jesus. But by Friday afternoon he still had no coat or tie. Then late Friday afternoon as he was praying, someone knocked at the door. His aunt opened the door and shouted, "Mombassa, come! Your God has sent a suit."

Mombassa hurried to the door and found a man selling a suit, complete with shirt and tie. It looked new. "How much?" Mombassa asked, trembling, for he had almost no money.

"Just 20,000 meticaïs (about US 50 cents at that time)," the man said. Mombassa could hardly believe what he heard.

He slipped the coat on; it fit perfectly. He held up the pants; they did not even need ironing! Quickly he paid the man and took the suit to his room. There he knelt to thank God for the blessing.

During the mission report time that Sabbath Mombassa told how God had provided his Sabbath suit. "When I could not help myself," he said, "God sent a stranger with exactly what I needed and just in time."

Mombassa returned home from church and found his uncle had arrived. "Uncle, look at the suit that my God has sent!" he said.

When Mombassa meets someone who doubts God's care, he tells them about the Sabbath suit God sent.

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*Manuel Mombassa (left) lives in Chimoio, Mozambique. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.*