

**Systematic Theology for the Local Church**  
**#47—Pneumatology—Part I<sup>1</sup>**  
**The Personal Existence of the Holy Spirit**  
 Paul Karleen  
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The next study will be on the deity of the Holy Spirit. Helpful for that study is Reymond, 312-14 and 335-340. Helpful for the present study is Reymond, pp. 314-321 and House, Section 35.

Because he cannot be seen, the Holy Spirit's actual existence and personal nature have often been doubted through the centuries. But the Bible declares in many places and in many ways that we are to regard the Holy Spirit as just as real as the Jesus who walked in Palestine, with the same ability to interact rationally with human beings and the universe, with whose creation the Spirit Himself was involved. The Holy Spirit is a personal being, distinguishable from the other two personal beings that comprise the Holy Trinity. It is important to emphasize this personal existence or existence as a person, because down through the ages many have attempted to reduce the Holy Spirit to an influence or a mode of God's existence (God sometimes appears as a Father, sometimes as a Son and sometimes as a Spirit). The Holy Spirit is not a person in the same way that a human being is a person, but he has individual existence and personhood<sup>2</sup>. We are thus asserting that there are personal beings who are not human beings (angels are also personal beings). In this sense we can refer to him as a person, a personal being or as a being having personality or personal existence. This study will set forth the basic features of the personal existence of the Holy Spirit, essentially allowing the Bible to speak for itself<sup>3</sup>.

**1. The Holy Spirit has the qualities of a personal being.**

a. He has mental capacity; he thinks.

1 Cor. 2:10-11: <sup>10</sup>but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup>For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Rom. 8:27: And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Beings that think in the way described in these passages have personal existence. God created us with minds, and verses such as these teach that in the Christian life we relate to a being who thinks as we do (except for the ways in which sin influences our minds).

b. He has emotions, feelings and interest.

Eph. 4:30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Rom. 15:30: I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 319-21, for a discussion of the use of 'person' with regard to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these observations reflect the treatment of the personality of the Holy Spirit by Charles Ryrie in his *The Holy Spirit* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1965), 11-16.

Only personal beings have the emotions and interest described in verses such as these. At the very least such statements show us that emotions are good things. Righteous anger, concern or grief are reactions that we share with the Holy Spirit. Think of this from the other side: the Holy Spirit fully understands these reactions in us and can empathize with us. The love of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:30) is the love of a person and not an automaton or an influence.

c. He has a will and desires.

1 Cor. 12:11: All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Acts 16:6-11: <sup>6</sup>Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup>When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup>So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup>After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

In these passages we see the Holy Spirit directing human beings to do certain things—goals that he has for them. Only personal beings have such plans and purposes that they express to others. Bringing structure to life through a personal will is something we share with the Spirit. When our desires are in line with Scripture, we can know that the Holy Spirit understands them and will work to support them.

d. He is referred to with terms used of a personal being.

Jn. 16:13-14: <sup>13</sup>But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup>He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

## **2. The Holy Spirit does the things that personal beings do.**

a. He teaches people.

Jn. 14:26: But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

We do not have an impersonal instructor in spiritual things, but a personal being who understands our needs as persons and understands how personal beings can know things.

b. He acts as a witness or testifier.

Jn. 15:26: When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

We can know that as a personal being the Holy Spirit is concerned about testimony to and attestation of what is true. This should make the search for what is true important to us. Too many Christians are lazy about finding out what is true.

c. He acts as a guide.

Rom. 8:14: because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

d. He persuades people.

Jn. 16:7-8: <sup>7</sup> But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;

This persuasion is a precursor to the Spirit's work in saving souls. When we present the gospel we can be certain that, if the person is one of the elect, the Holy Spirit will do the persuasive and convicting work—we cannot and should not try to.

e. He holds back the actions of people.

Gen. 6:3: Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

The Spirit's personal work toward us can involve restraining evil that would harm us but it can also be part of discipline that stops us from doing what we would otherwise do.

f. He commands people.

Act 8:29: The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

g. He works miracles.

Acts 8:39: When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

h. He intercedes.

Rom. 8:26: In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

This great intercessory work is made to the Father on our behalf by a personal being who is remarkably like us. He intercedes because he loves us and desires to fulfill God's purpose for us.

### **3. People act toward the Holy Spirit as they do toward personal beings.**

a. People obey the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:19-21: <sup>19</sup> While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." <sup>21</sup> Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

We have experienced this when we are prompted by the Spirit and do what he leads us to do, interacting with him as one person to another.

b. People lie to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3: Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?”

c. People resist the work of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 7:51: “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

d. People grieve the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 4:30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

We know in our hearts that the Holy Spirit is a personal being when we resist what he prompts us to do from Scripture—something that grieves him as we can grieve human beings. Grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) amounts to grieving a person, and, in fact, one who loves us infinitely.

e. People blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

Mt. 12:31: And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

None of these actions are things that people would do to something that is simply an influence.

#### **4. The Holy Spirit relates as a personal being to known personal beings.**

a. He is linked to the apostles as a personal being.

Acts. 15:28: It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

b. He is said to be related to the Father and Son as a personal being.

Mt. 28:19: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

### **Conclusion**

This study has had the purpose of demonstrating from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a personal being. If this is so, and the mass of evidence confirms it, then this has significant implications for the Christian life. In all our relations with the Holy Spirit we are interacting with a personal being who is much like us, except for sin and our finiteness. God created us in his image, and part of that image is personhood. We never deal with a machine when we interact with the Holy Spirit, but with a being who has made us like himself in order that we might enjoy a personal relationship with each other.

**Study questions:**

1. Fill in the following as many times as you can:

I am thankful that the Holy Spirit is a person, because \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Take any five of the lettered points above and suggest implications for the Christian life.

## Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiration* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning "standard"; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation

30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.
39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.