

**Systematic Theology for the Local Church**  
**#48—Pneumatology—Part II<sup>1</sup>**  
**The Deity of the Holy Spirit**  
 Paul Karleen  
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The next study will be on the work of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. Helpful for the present study are Reymond, pp. 312-14 and 335-340, and House, Section #35.

In the previous study we looked at a wealth of biblical evidence for the fact that the Holy Spirit is a personal being, not simply an influence. Closely connected with the error that the Holy Spirit is not a person is the position that the Spirit is somehow less of a deity than the Father and Son, a view held by some cults.

Perhaps in the interpretation of the Bible the Holy Spirit has been slighted because He is invisible and is the least prominent of the three Persons of the Godhead. Clearly, He is indispensably involved in God's design for the provision of salvation, but He has assumed a role supportive of the Lord Jesus Christ, who in turn acts in obedience to the Father. But we must not mistake such a position as indicating inferior status. If we did, we would, for example, slight the great works done in each believer during this age through the Holy Spirit. In fact, the most prominent presence of God with the believer during this age is expressed by the teaching on the Spirit's activity in and through individuals. The Son is in us (Jn. 14:23; Col. 1:28), as is the Father (Jn. 14:23, the only description of that indwelling), but the Spirit's presence is described the most. Keep in mind that it would be a logical strategy for Satan to minimize the deity of the Holy Spirit (as well as His personality and even His existence) in order to prevent the believer from entering into and enjoying to the fullest the wonderful works of God toward him during this age through the third Person of the Trinity<sup>2</sup>.

**1. The Holy Spirit has the qualities or attributes of deity.**

a. He is has the knowledge that God has.

1 Cor. 2:11-12: <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. <sup>12</sup> We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

b. He is omnipresent.

Ps. 139:7: Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

This verse tells us that the Holy Spirit has universal presence and links the Spirit with the addressee of the psalm, Yahweh, through this omnipresence, i.e. the Spirit is omnipresent and so is Yahweh, so they must be the same being.

c. He is truth.

1 Jn. 5:6: This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the following observations reflect the treatment of the deity of the Holy Spirit by Charles Ryrie in his *The Holy Spirit* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1965), 17-22.

Please notice that John does not say that the Spirit is ‘true,’ which would mean that he corresponds to what is real and valid, but that he himself is the truth—meaning that he embodies and is the standard for what is true.

d. He is holy.

Lk. 11:13: If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The Bible emphasizes in many places that only God is holy.

e. He imparts life.

Rom. 8:2: because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

## **2. The Holy Spirit does things that only God can do.**

a. He created the physical universe.

Gen. 1:2: Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

b. He is the author of Scripture.

2 Pet. 1:21: For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

c. He is the agent of the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lk. 1:35: The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

The NT presents this event as a miracle, so the work of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth is something that only God can do.

d. He convicts people of sin.

Jn. 16:8-9: <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;

e. He regenerates people for salvation.

Jn. 3:6: Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

f. He intercedes with the Father on behalf of believers.

Rom. 8:26: <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.

This shows knowledge that is beyond that of human beings.

g. At salvation He sets believers apart for a holy life.

2 Th. 2:13: <sup>13</sup> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

### **3. The Holy Spirit is linked with God in ways that assert his deity.**

a. He is identified with the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

The following two examples involve assertions of the deity of the Holy Spirit that are implicit in the relationship between an OT passage and its use in the NT:

Acts 28:25 and Paul's quotation of Isa. 6:9-11:

<sup>25</sup> They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> " 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

In Isa. 6 it is "the voice of the Lord" that speaks the words that Paul assigns to the Holy Spirit. Clearly Paul was asserting the deity of the Holy Spirit as he saw the Spirit speaking through Isaiah.

Heb. 10:15-17, quoting Jer. 31:31-34:

<sup>15</sup> The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: <sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." <sup>17</sup> Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

It is "the Lord" (Yahweh) who speaks in Jer. 31, yet the writer to the Hebrews ascribes these words to the Holy Spirit.

b. He is equated with God.

Acts 5:3-4: <sup>3</sup> 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? <sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

In this passage Peter clearly identifies the Holy Spirit with God, since when Ananias lied to the Spirit he lied to God.

c. He is given equality with the Father and Son.

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.

Many students of Scripture have noticed in this verse that there is one name that covers all three persons.

2 Cor. 13:14: <sup>14</sup> May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Paul associates Jesus and the Spirit with God in a way that reveals that he views them as equal with God.

#### **4. The Holy Spirit has independent deity.**

For centuries theologians have pondered the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Many have seen in Jn. 15:26 (“who goes out from the Father”) a description of an eternal relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit. Here is the text of Jn. 15:26:

<sup>26</sup> “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.

As an example of the prevailing view of what this verse teaches, here is Charles Ryrie’s explanation<sup>3</sup>:

How the persons of the Trinity are related to each other is difficult to express. The relation of the Spirit to the other persons of the Trinity is usually expressed by the term “procession.” Therefore, the procession of the Holy Spirit means that in His being and eternity he is related to the Father and to the Son in that He proceeded from them. Another definition states that procession (or spiration as it is sometimes called) is “that eternal and necessary act of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity whereby they, within the divine Being, become the ground of the personal subsistence of the Holy Spirit, and put the Third person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation or change.”<sup>4</sup> The concept was formulated in the Constantinopolitan Creed (381) with the addition of the filioque (“and Son”) clause at the Synod of Toledo (589). Throughout history the Western church has affirmed the procession from the Father *and Son*, whereas the Eastern church has not.

Ryrie’s paragraph is largely built around the quotation from Louis Berkhof that he provides. Texts used to support the Spirit’s procession from the Son in addition to the Father are:

Gal. 4:6: Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*”

Rom. 8:9: You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Jn. 16:7: When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

I conclude, however, that Jn. 15:26, the main support for this view, is speaking not of the basic existential relation between the Spirit and the other persons of the Trinity but of the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son to minister within the plan of redemption. Many scriptures tell us that the Son subjected himself to the Father for the purpose of bringing about salvation. In addition, we are told that the Spirit, though fully

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<sup>3</sup> Ryrie, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 97.

God, subjects himself to the Father and Son and supports the ministry of the Son (see Jn. 16:7). Robert Reymond quotes J. H. Bernard's observation on Jn. 15:26 in support of this conclusion<sup>5</sup>:

To interpret the phrase of what is called "the Eternal Procession" of the Spirit has been a habit of theologians. . . . But to claim that this interpretation was present to the mind of Jn. would be to import into the Gospel the controversies and doctrines of the fourth century. [The clause] does not refer to the mysterious relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but only to the fact that the Spirit who bears witness of Jesus Christ has come from God.

Phrases such as 'Spirit of his Son, 'Spirit of Christ' and 'Spirit of Jesus' do not mean that the Son is the ground of the Spirit's existence, but that the Spirit is associated with the Son in ministry.

**Conclusion: The presence of the Spirit in us is the presence of God.**

A significant consequence of what we have seen in this study is that the Holy Spirit brings to the believer all of God he ever could dream of having. In a genuine sense, the Holy Spirit is our representative from God during this age (see Jn. 14:16). This is a biblical fact that is designed to lead us to dependence as well as boldness. In spite of the great things people have accomplished for God since Pentecost, it is safe to say that no human being has ever drawn on that indwelling presence as fully as he could. There is always more of God available to us through the presence of the third Person in us.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 338, quoting from Bernard's *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 2:499.

## **Study questions**

1. What is meant by the 'procession of the Holy Spirit.' Why have people held this view, and what does the Bible say about it?
2. Using the lettered points and scripture references, suggest how they can impact your 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'.