

**Paper**  
**POWER OR PERSON: NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ”**

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Abstract: Scripture is the primary source for any knowledge of the God of heaven—and when dealing with issues of divinity, it must be studied attentively and listened to carefully. Within its sacred pages God reveals Himself with a triune identity. The nature of the biblical God cannot be fully explained without God the Holy Spirit, along with Jesus and the Father.

God’s personal plurality, seen throughout Scripture, presents One of the Three of the divine Godhead as the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit has never been incarnated as Jesus was, He is more inscrutable, making, to a greater extent, potential misunderstandings and distortions about Him possible.

Dealing with the Spirit, we encounter God Himself: (1) His awesome presence; (2) the infilling of Christ through the Holy Spirit; and (3) in God’s Word inscripturated by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> One of the final invitations in Scripture is given by the Spirit: “the Spirit and the Bride say ‘come’” (Rev 22:17). Canonical writers present the Holy Spirit as divine, and a divine person. A Christianity neglectful of the Spirit is hardly biblical Christianity at all.

This paper will address these parameters, reviewing the mysterious but very real Third Member of the Godhead.

Scripture is the primary source for any knowledge of the God of heaven—and it must be studied attentively and listened to carefully especially when studying the divine nature. Within its sacred pages God reveals Himself with a triune identity. The nature of the biblical God cannot be fully understood without God the HS, along with Jesus and the Father.

The divine personal plurality, seen throughout Scripture, presents One of the Three within the Godhead as the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit has never been incarnated as Jesus was, He is more inscrutable, making misunderstandings and

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<sup>1</sup>How vastly different is this than the description of Christianity given by Kant and Freud.

distortions possible when trying to understand Him. For example, even after his baptism (Acts 8), Simon had to be sharply rebuked by Peter for his wrong thinking about the Holy Spirit. Ellen White also reminds:

The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, there is much that can be known about the HS. And it is critical knowledge because it affects our understanding of who God is along with any study of revelation—inspiration, salvation, sanctification, and even the church—for the Holy Spirit is clearly involved with all of these. We must not let the “depersonalized, nonregenerative pneumatology”<sup>3</sup> of liberal theology throttle our thinking.<sup>4</sup> Paul also counsels to “test the spirits” for not every spirit is guaranteed to be the Holy Spirit. That there are false spirits implies, however, there must be a true one.

When God incarnate, Jesus, came to earth bringing salvation, people could walk with Him, hear His voice, touch Him, and see His footprints when He walked on dusty streets and along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. However, the “Holy Spirit leaves no footprints in the sand” as Abraham Kuyper writes in his classic work on the Holy Spirit.

Jesus compares the Holy Spirit to the wind: “The wind blows where it wishes, and

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<sup>2</sup>Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 52.

<sup>3</sup>David F. Wells, *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), xii.

<sup>4</sup>The deity and personality of the Holy Spirit are generally denied by liberal, critical theology. Process theology tends to be vague and abstract with respect to the Spirit. Neo-orthodoxy and existential theology either ignores the Holy Spirit (as Rudolf Bultmann) or freely expresses doubt and uncertainty about Him (as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner).

you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes” (Jn 3:8). The wind cannot be captured or restrained though trees swaying, flags fluttering, and dangerous storms make it manifest. Wind is elusive of human control and invisible but nonetheless real. So it is with the Holy Spirit. He is intangible and invisible. But He is more real and powerful than the most ferocious wind. Dorothy Sayers suggests—

why books about the Holy Ghost are apt to be curiously difficult and unsatisfactory—we cannot really look at the movement of the Spirit, just because *It* is the Power by which we do the looking.<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Spirit is not presented in the Bible as an abstract force, power, or thing but as “He.” This is one evidence that the HS is a personal being. When speaking about persons, pronouns such as *you*, *he*, *I* and *she* can be used—and personal pronouns are also ascribed to the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus speaks of the Spirit as “Whom” and He.” In John 16:13, Jesus says:

When **He**, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He** will guide you into all truth; for **He** will not speak on **His** own authority, but whatever **He** hears **He** will speak; and **He** will tell you things to come... when the Helper comes, **whom** I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, **He** will testify of Me.”

Jesus’ earthly mission is also portrayed as Spirit-initiated and Spirit-oriented. The

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<sup>5</sup>The quote in its entirety reads thus: We cannot follow the movement of our own eyes in a mirror. We can, by turning our head, observe them in this position and in that position with respect to our body, but never in the act of moving themselves from one position to the other, and never in the act of gazing at anything but the mirror. Thus our idea of ourself is bound to be falsified, since what to others appears the most lively and mobile part of ourself, appears to us unnaturally fixed. The eye is the instrument by which we see everything, and for that reason it is the one thing we cannot see with truth. The same thing is true of our Power of response to a book, or to anything else ... **this is why books about the Holy Ghost are apt to be curiously difficult and unsatisfactory—we cannot really look at the movement of the Spirit, just because *It* is the Power by which we do the looking.**” *The Mind of the Maker* by Dorothy Sayers, quoted by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1987), 180 (emphasis added; “*It*” is Sayers emphasis).

Holy Spirit was the agent of Jesus' birth for Jesus was "conceived ... of the Holy Spirit." Thus the incarnation of the Son involves the Spirit (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35). Later, Jesus' public ministry is inaugurated by the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Matt 3:16). Peter later refers to this and testifies that God "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 10:38). Following this, Jesus was driven into the desert by the same Spirit (Mark 1:12). Following that Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14). The Holy Spirit, through whom He was conceived, baptized and anointed is the divine agent in exorcisms (Matt 12:18, 24-32; Mark 3:22-30). It is by the "eternal Spirit" that Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:14), and by the same Spirit He rose from His grave (Rom 8:11).

Jesus has not abandoned His human nature but remains true God and truly human. He is absent, yet He is with us according to His promise (Matt 28:20). Followers of Jesus live by faith in His words through the promised vicarious work of the Spirit, who, by being present, mediates the presence of both Father and Son to believers (Eph 1:13-14).

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "another Paraclete," who will continue His ministry (Jn 14:16). This second Paraclete gives intelligible directives to a fledgling New Testament Church just as Jesus did. Jesus portrays the Spirit as a person as much as He Himself is.

John strengthens this point by using the personal pronoun *ekeinos* ("he") to render Christ's references to the Spirit, when Greek grammar more naturally would use the neuter *ekeino* ("it") to agree with the neuter noun *pneuma* ("Spirit," the Greek

equivalent of *ruach*). This personal pronoun, used in numerous verses in John (14:26; 15:26; and 16:8, 13, 14), is all the more striking because in 14:17, where the Spirit is first introduced, John uses the grammatically appropriate neuter pronouns (*ho* and *auto*). The subsequent shift to the masculine expresses his theology—and John was being inspired by the Spirit as he wrote!

Not only are personal pronouns ascribed to the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit speaks and gives intentional instructions. Only a person can act with intentionality. Abstract forces can ever “intend” to do anything. Intentions are limited to personal beings.

Biblical writers also present the Holy Spirit with a variety of characteristics that further reveal His personal nature, including intelligence and knowledge, such as “He will teach you” (Jn 14:26; 1 Cr 12:11);

- Hebrews 3:7 has the Holy Spirit saying what is written in Psalm 95:7-11, and in Hebrews 10:16-17 He quotes Jeremiah (32:33-34);
- in Hebrews 9:8, the Holy Spirit explains a function of the heavenly sanctuary, implying that He is knowledgeable of it;
- the Holy Spirit is also the Author of Scripture: “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The Spirit employed human writers to record the revelation of God in human language and He subsequently speaks these inspired words to each believer. The Holy Spirit is thereby the canon’s paramount interpreter.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Emil Brunner rightly observes: “the Scripture without the Spirit produces false legalism ... so the Spirit without the Scriptures produces false Antinomianism, and fanaticism.” Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 85.

The intimate relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus is also portrayed in the Gospels, the book of Acts, and by Paul—for many New Testament passages speak of the Son and the Spirit side by side in a very obvious way:

- churches walk in “fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit;”
- the “Holy Spirit dwells in you ... Christ in you (Rom 8);
- the “Holy Spirit loves ... Jesus loves” (John 14:21);
- “[we are] ... justified by the name of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit;”
- both have been rejected—“ ... the Son of God was “trampled” God ... and the Spirit of grace” was “insulted” the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29);(Phil 2:1);
- divine directives are given by both: in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus states “I say” (Matt 5); in the book of Revelation it is stated that “the Spirit says to the churches”;
- both bring justification—“you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is referred to as “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11), “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7), “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19), and “the Spirit of his Son” (Gal 4:6)—and is a source of divine power.

Because the Holy Spirit was so intimately associated with the entire earthly life, death, and resurrection of Christ, He is obviously the One who can correctly interpret the acts of Jesus and inspire the written record of Him in Scripture (2 Tim 3:16).

There are also biblical passages linking the Father, Son and Spirit in their work of grace (for example, John 14:16-16:15; Rom 8; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:3-13;

2:18; 3:14-19; 4:4-6; 2 Thes 2:13-14; 1 Pet 1:2). The Spirit-inspired Word of God is the source and norm of the gospel—the HS ever assuring us of the love of Christ:

- the Spirit enables the human heart to see the truth of the gospel and respond;
- and the sanctifying work of the Spirit brings a believer into the likeness of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The writings of Paul underscore the significance of the Spirit in salvation. It is accomplished for us on the cross of Christ and applied to us by His Spirit. Paul also affirms that “He who raised His Christ from the dead” will raise our “mortal bodies through His Spirit” (Rm 8:11).

In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is promised to come to those who repent and are baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of ... sins” (Acts 2:38). John’s Gospel speaks similarly. Jesus declares that: the Spirit comes “in My name” (14:26); “the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father” in order to testify about Me” (15:26); “I will send Him to you” (16:7); and—“He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (20:22).

The book of Acts also includes many important reminders that the Holy Spirit is more than an abstract force. He is portrayed as the personal agent who instructs the disciples, giving them the power they need to fulfill their Christ-given commission. Lesslie Newbigin describes one example:

The events recounted with great care in Acts 10 and 11 are often summarized as ‘the conversion of Cornelius,’ but they were equally the conversion of Peter and of the Church. It was no missionary zeal, and no native liberalism of Peter, which took him to the house of an uncircumcised Roman soldier and placed him in the position of having to tell the story of Jesus in that pagan household. It was the

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<sup>7</sup>Calvin: “God the Father gives us the Holy Spirit for His Son’s sake, and yet has bestowed the whole fullness of the Spirit upon the Son to be minister and steward of His liberality.”

Spirit who put him there, and it was the Spirit who shattered all of Peter's strongest religious certainties by giving to Cornelius and his household exactly the same experience of deliverance and joy as the Apostles themselves had received. In the presence of the *fait accompli* Peter, and—later—the whole Church had simply to follow where they were led.<sup>8</sup>

When Peter and Cornelius are brought together by the Holy Spirit, this results in more than the conversion of Cornelius to the gospel. It was also Peter's "conversion" to the inclusive nature of the gospel which breaks down the cultural barriers separating Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female.<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Spirit also exhibits emotions and other qualities of a person:

- He can be grieved—[Israel] "grieved the Holy Spirit"; believers are warned not to "grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4:30);
- He can be resisted—"you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51); and
- lied to (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:3-4, 9)—indicating someone who can be spoken to;
- He can be blasphemed—a grave sin done to God (Matt 12:31; Mark 3:29);
- He speaks—"the Spirit said to Philip ... Go" (Acts 8:29);

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<sup>8</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 216.

<sup>9</sup>Cultural divisions always exist. In the ancient world, the division of Jew and Gentile was a fact. The alienation of Gentiles from Israel left the Gentiles, in Paul's words, "Separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the World" (Eph. 2:12). The wonder of Christ's work is that he abolished that wall, bringing to an end the hostile division—and preached peace, so that "through Him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). It was the outworking of God's mission: "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8; cf. Gal. 3:15; 1 Tm 2:7; Rm 15:15-22). It is a mystery now made known:

"The mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit of God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:4-6).

See also Galatians 3:27-29.



- and He teaches—“Holy Spirit will teach you” (Luke 12:12); also—
- the HS has divine insight—“For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Cr 2:10, 11);
- He calls to ministry, such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2);
- gives precise directives, as Peter mentions, “the Spirit told me to go with them” (Acts 11);
- He bears witness—that we are the children of God (Rom 8:15, 16);
- works out sanctification in human lives (2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2);
- Paul stresses that both Christ and the Holy Spirit intercede for us (Rom 8:26-34): the Holy Spirit making “intercession for us ... with groans” (Rm 8:26). Intercession can only be done by a personal being.

It is possible to:

1. be filled by Him—“be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18);
2. be assured by Him (“in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance” [1 Thes 1:5];
3. insult Him—“insult the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29); and
4. quench Him (“Do not quench the Spirit” [1 Thes 5:19]);

In Acts 9:31 the church is described as living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, suggesting the Spirit’s comforting is real—again presenting the Holy Spirit as something far more than merely a divine energy or power.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of truth as Martin Luther asserts: “The Holy Spirit is no Skeptic, and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but

assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience.”<sup>10</sup> A mere abstract power has no intelligence let alone an understanding of truth. This undergirding of truth by the Holy Spirit is vital, as Glenn Tinder notes:

Christians who are very anxious about the fate of God’s truth must have forgotten the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which implies that God does not send his truth into history like a ship that is launched and then forgotten. He is the source at once of the truth human beings face and of the inspiration that enables them to recognize it as the truth and, in a measure, to understand it. If God were not the Holy Spirit, who provides understanding, his Word would be inaudible and the life of Christ without significance. It was not his intent that revelation should be inconsequential. His Word, he assures us, “shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.”<sup>11</sup>

In the Bible we are instructed to believe in the Holy Spirit. We are baptized into His name as well as the name of the Father and the Son. Benedictions in the New Testament include reference to fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). The Spirit is Someone to whom our prayers can be addressed. Believers are not to pray to “things.” This would be praying to idols, and idolatry is forbidden in both the Old and New Testaments.

The salvific role of the Third Person of the one God is crucial and described by Jesus Himself. If it wasn’t for the work of the Holy Spirit, no one would ever be converted to Christ. The curse of sin with its resulting alienation from God is notable throughout Scripture. Thus the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in convicting of sin (John 16:8-11) is critical. According to Paul, a person doesn’t naturally seek God: “none is righteous, no,

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<sup>10</sup>LW 33:24.

<sup>11</sup>Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 131.

not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God” (Rom 3:10-11). That there are people who are searching for God and yearning to receive salvation is evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work, convicting of sin and righteousness, and drawing to Christ.<sup>12</sup> In the final analysis, no one rejects Christ because of lack of information and arguments, but because of the absence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White is clear:

Christ declares that the divine influence of the Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. But by some this promise is not appreciated as it should be; its fulfillment is not realized as it might be. Learning, talents, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner won to Christ. When His disciples are connected with Christ, when the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, even the poorest and most ignorant of them will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channel for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.<sup>13</sup>

An important example of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit is seen as Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:37 states that “when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles ... ‘what shall we do?’”—their hearts pierced by “the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.” The word “pierced” used of the Spirit in Acts 2:37 is the strong word used to describe the soldier piercing the body of Jesus on the cross.<sup>14</sup> “Peter’s Pentecost sermon not only

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<sup>12</sup>See also: “The office of the Holy Spirit is distinctly specified in the words of Christ: “When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” John 16:8. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts of sin. If the sinner responds to the quickening influence of the Spirit, he will be brought to repentance and aroused to the importance of obeying the divine requirements.

To the repentant sinner, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the Holy Spirit reveals the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. “He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you,” Christ said. “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” John 16:14; 14:26.” Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 51.

<sup>13</sup>Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 15, 1910.

<sup>14</sup>The Holy Spirit is often described in the book of Acts as “piercing” men’s hearts (the same verb used to describe what the Roman centurion did to the body of Jesus on the cross) which brought them to repentance and contrition.

interprets what has happened, it causes something to happen.”<sup>15</sup> Pentecost, in the book of Acts, is both about the coming of the Spirit and the Lordship of Christ who sends the Spirit, as Peter describes: “Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

The gifts of the Spirit are special proof that God’s grace has been extended to and accepted. It is one of the chief themes in the New Testament, including the book of Acts.

Robert Tannehill is insightful:

“The emphasis on the Spirit as gift indicates that the Spirit’s presence is a powerful experience of God’s grace. Thus the Spirit is not merely a means to an end, but part of the blessings of salvation and is presented as such.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul writes about the distribution of spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit, obviously viewing the Spirit as a rational being making rational choices.

The virtues which adorn the new life in Christ are also the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24). The love which is the fulfilling of the law is the love of Jesus and the Spirit (Rom 15:30; Gal 5:22). It is the regenerating of the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5) that brings newness of life and it is in the Holy Spirit that the life well-pleasing to God is defined. Thereby the true believer is indwelt, governed, and directed by the radical personal power of the Holy Spirit. Such a Spirit-filled life is no mere patching up, but a brand new life!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Robert Tannehill, *Narrative Unity ...* vol 2, 26.

<sup>16</sup>Tannehill, *Narrative Unity ....*”, vol 2, 13.

<sup>17</sup>Ellen White: “The Spirit is given as a regenerating agency, to make effectual the salvation wrought by the death of our Redeemer. The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open the

The Holy Spirit enables the ethical life. It is only those who have the Spirit, who have the mind of the Spirit, who are in the Spirit, who are indwelt by the Spirit of God and have the Spirit of Christ, who are able to do that which is well-pleasing to God (Rom 8:5-13). Newness of life is described as the “newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6)—and is compared to Jesus’ resurrection, for it is the Spirit who makes alive (2 Cor 3:6). Believers are led of the Spirit (Rom 8:14) and now walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).

The ministry of the Spirit is completely centered in and shaped by the gospel. Redemption is His task.<sup>18</sup> He convicts the world of the truth, brings new birth, helps Christians to be like Christ, and energizes the church as the body of Christ: Jesus promises “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, tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” (Jn 16:13-14).

The Old Testament holds out the promise that all God’s people will share in the gift of the presence and power of the Spirit (Joel 2). In Ephesians, Paul also speaks of the access both Jews and Gentiles have to the Father “by one Spirit” (2:18). Addressing

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convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures.” *Acts of the Apostles*, 52. “Those who consecrate body, soul, and spirit to God, will constantly receive a new endowment of physical, mental, and spiritual power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own Spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth His highest energies to work in heart and mind.” *Gospel Workers*, 113.

<sup>18</sup>Ellen White: “The Spirit is given as a regenerating agency, to make effectual the salvation wrought by the death of our Redeemer. The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures.

Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth and fills the soul with a desire for holiness. “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13), the Saviour declared. If men are willing to be molded, there will be brought about a sanctification of the whole being. The Spirit will take the things of God and stamp them on the soul. By His power the way of life will be made so plain that none need err therein. *Acts of the Apostles*, 52.

Gentiles he specifically refers to the reception of the Spirit:

“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory” (1:13-14).

The coming of the Spirit marks the promised extension of the gospel at Pentecost (chap. 2):

- among the Samaritans (Acts 8);
- to the Gentiles (chaps 10-11);
- to the disciples of John the Baptist (chap 19).
- it is the evidence Peter appeals to at the Council of Jerusalem:

“God who knows the heart showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.” (Acts 15:8-9)

At each of these dramatic events, God brought together sinful people, men and women, slave and free, Jews and Gentiles, into fellowship. He had promised to do it—and He did it through the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the **Third Person of the Godhead**, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies of evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.<sup>19</sup>

In both the Old and New Testaments, God insists that He can foretell the future,

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<sup>19</sup>Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 671, emphasis added.

and that this is a mark of His divinity (Isa 41; Rev 1). The Holy Spirit also declares things to come. The Holy Spirit revealed the future to Simeon (Luke 2:26). In one of Peter's speeches, he describes the Spirit foretelling what would happen to Judas (Acts 1:16). The prophet Agabus also tells Paul, "Thus says the Holy Spirit: 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man'" (Acts 21:11). The Spirit is plainly portrayed as God here with the prophetic formula "thus says the Lord—"thus says the Holy Spirit." In Miletus Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit telling him that imprisonment and persecution await him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23). There are also numerous references to the HS in Revelation, many of them having to do with the Spirit as the source of John's prophecy. Abstract powers are not conscious of time.

To be possessed by the Spirit is to be empowered by God. To flee from the Spirit is to flee from God. Encountering the Spirit, we encounter God. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God in both Testaments, specifically mentioned also by Jesus:

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans" (Jn 14:16-20).

The Holy Spirit is not an abstract power at our disposal. Rather, He is sovereign. We are His auxiliary. Jesus doesn't promise that the Spirit will help us to witness. Rather, the Spirit will bear witness and secondarily use us:

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. And you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak: for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Matt 10:16-20).

The Spirit, the Father and the Son are all revealed as Persons in Scripture, and all three are consistently treated as part of the divine identity. For example, recall the trinitarian benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:13—“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the HS be with you all.” Grace, love and communion are all divine gifts and each Person of the Godhead brings these blessings to believers.

As God promises in Joel 2:

“I will pour out My Spirit on all people ... And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.” (Joel 2:28, 32)

New Testament writers refer to the deity of the Holy Spirit in a notable manner:

- They call Him “holy” no less than 89 times—the only member of the Godhead with this title regularly attached. Only God is holy;
- “Glory” is also a divine attribute. Yahweh being “the God of glory” (Ps 29:3). The Father is “the glorious Father” (Eph 1:17), Jesus is “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8; James 2:1), and the Spirit is “the Spirit of glory” (1 Pet 4:14);
- as the Father and the Son give “life,” so the Spirit gives “life” (John 5:21, 26; 6:32-33, 63; Rom 8:2; 2 Cor 3:6);
- Jesus also significantly calls God “Spirit” (Jn 4:24).

Biblical testimony from the Old Testament instructs that when encountering the Spirit, one is encountering God. The New Testament is equally strong that when one encounters the Spirit one is encountering a Person. The New Testament is explicit about the personhood of the Spirit. His name is included in New Testament references to the threefold God (Matt 28:19; Rom 1:3-4; 1 Pet 1:12). He is divine, and a divine person.



Dealing with the Spirit, we encounter God Himself, including :

- His awesome presence; and
- in God's Word inscripturated by the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

One of the final invitations in Scripture is given by the Spirit: "the Spirit and the Bride say 'come'" (Rev 22:17).

A Christianity neglectful of the Spirit is hardly biblical Christianity at all. This is why

Christians are urged in the book, *Amazing Grace*:

Pray that the **mighty energies of the Holy Spirit, with all their quickening, recuperative, and transforming power, may fall like an electric shock on the palsy-stricken soul, causing every nerve to thrill with new life**, restoring the whole man from his dead, earthly, sensual state to spiritual soundness. You will thus become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; and in your souls will be reflected the image of Him by whose stripes you are healed.<sup>21</sup>

Is the Third Member of the Godhead a Power or a Person? The testimony of Scripture, inspired by the Spirit is that He is both: a divine Person—with omnipotent power.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>How vastly different is this than the description of Christianity given by Kant and Freud.

<sup>21</sup>Ellen White, *Amazing Grace*, 312, emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup>Ellen White: "He [Jesus] knew that truth armed with **the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit**, would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers." AA 20.