

LESSON 7

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I. INTRODUCTION (PG. 27)

In this lesson we will be considering the Person of the Holy Spirit; thinking carefully about what the Bible reveals about Him. Why is this important?

Imagine this: Tomorrow, I find my affections incredibly stirred for my wife. I've been thinking about her at work and can't get her off my mind. So moved, when I go home, I'm looking for some way to communicate how I feel and so I get on my knees, look at her in the eyes, heart hurting from longing for her and I tell her, "Honey, I'm crazy about you; you're irresistible; I don't know *what* it is today, maybe it's your short blonde hair or stunning blue eyes; but you leave me breathless." Some of you may think that's sweet, but the problem is my wife has brown hair...and green eyes. So it may sound sweet, but that's going to go bad for me - I'm in trouble.

In the same way how we see God is important, because if we aren't seeing Him as He's revealed Himself in Scripture, we aren't worshipping God, but rather a *false* God.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD (PG. 27)

Well, it's not only in the terms used for the third person of the Godhead that presents his divine nature. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is fully God. In addition to the many divine titles given to Him that we have already reviewed, the Bible, in several other ways, affirms the full deity of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes (pg. 27)

When we considered the person of Christ a couple of lessons ago, we observed from Scripture that he was fully God and one of the ways this was evidenced was because he maintained divine attributes. Well, in the same way, if we're to say that the Holy Spirit is fully God, then we should presume that he would possess divine attributes, and we do. Throughout Scripture we see that...

- The Holy Spirit is *eternal*. Hebrews 9:14 says, "**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death....**"
- The Holy Spirit is *omnipresent*. Psalm 139:7-10 says, "**Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depth, you are there.**"
- The Holy Spirit is *omniscient*. I Corinthians 2:10-11 says, "**The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 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.**"

2. The Holy Spirit does divine work (pg. 27)

We will spend all of lesson 8 studying the work of the Holy Spirit, but for now we should just realize that the Spirit does divine work. For example, it's the Spirit who regenerates men. No one can enter the

kingdom of God unless he is born of the Spirit Jesus had just told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again in order to see the kingdom, and Nicodemus replied, **“Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”**⁵ Jesus answered, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:4-6). Well, who else can give birth to spirit but God? Much more could be said on this subject, but you’ll have to sit through the next lesson!

3. Scripture identifies Him as God (pg. 27)

If maintaining divine attributes and doing divine work does not settle in your mind the question of whether the Holy Spirit is God, then Scripture throws out a bone to us by referring to the Spirit as God.

Acts 5:1-4 says, **“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. 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? 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.*”**”

Here we see that according to Peter, when Ananias “lied to the “Holy Spirit,” he was in fact “lying to God.” If lying to the Spirit is synonymous with lying to God, then the Spirit must be God.

4. The Holy Spirit is identified as the Yahweh of the Old Testament (pg. 27)

Similar to our understanding that Scripture identifies the Spirit as God, we also see references of words spoken by the LORD in the Old Testament being attributed to those spoken by the Holy Spirit. So for example, what Isaiah reports that Yahweh said in Isaiah 6, Paul asserts the same thing of the Holy Spirit in Acts 28.

- Isaiah 6:9-10, “[The Lord] said, **“Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.”**
- Acts 28:25, **“The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”**”

We also see the words of Yahweh ascribed to the Holy Spirit in other places. For example, what the Psalmist puts in the mouth of Yahweh in Psalm 95, the author of Hebrews puts in the mouth of the Holy Spirit.

- In Psalm 95:7, Yahweh says, **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”**
- Hebrews 3:7 says, **“So as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”**

If we flipped back and forth between the Old and New Testaments, we would find repeated examples of the Old Testament authors ascribing statements to God and the New Testament authors quoting those

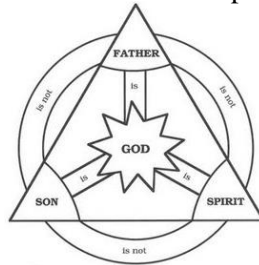
statements and ascribing them to the Holy Spirit. In so doing, the New Testament authors affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Questions or Comments?

5. Though distinguished from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is represented as equal with the Father and the Son in the great Trinitarian passages of the New Testament. (pg. 28)

The term “trinity” is not a Biblical term. You won’t find the word anywhere in Scripture. It was actually first coined by Tertullian after the generation of the Apostles. “Trinity” is a term that the church developed to summarize a doctrine that is given to us in fragments. It’s a helpful word that seeks to combine and convey all that Scripture speaks regarding the relationship of the Godhead.

You may remember that in one of our earlier classes we said that the doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of several biblical concepts that are indisputable from the text of Scripture. Namely that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each distinct persons, and that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each fully God.



So in answer to Muslims and other monotheistic religions, Christianity clearly affirms that there is only one God, but this one God exists in three Persons. Is that reasonable? In one sense “yes” and one sense “no.” “Yes,” because nothing in Trinitarian doctrine is unreasonable or irrational. There is nothing inherently contradictory about the position despite its mysteriousness. We’re not saying there are three Gods, but that there is one God in three persons. “No,” though, because “the doctrine of the Trinity is undiscoverable by reason, so it is incapable of proof from reason. There are no analogies to it in Nature, not even in the spiritual nature of man, who is made in the image of God.”

Even though nothing in the natural world can help us fully understand the Trinity, it’s not a proof-less doctrine. The fundamental proof that God is a Trinity is supplied by the revelation of the Trinity. That is to say, in the incarnation of God the Son and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit. In a word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit *are* the fundamental proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Let’s take a look now at some of the key Trinitarian passages in the New Testament:

- **Matt 3:16 – As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**

The three persons of the Godhead are seen clearly in this passage functioning in their distinct roles. God the Father is speaking from heaven, God the Son is being baptized to fulfill the Father’s will, and God the Spirit is seen descending from heaven upon the Son empowering his ministry. We see that whatever the Father does in dealing with man, He generally does through the Son by the Spirit. Listen to Ephesians 2:18, **“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”**

- **Matt 28:19 – Jesus says, “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.”**

Notice that Jesus does not instruct his disciples, to baptize new believers in the “names” of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, as if we were dealing with three different beings, but in the “name,” which is singular. Jesus, like he did so many other times in his ministry, teaches that He and the Father are one, and here He includes the Holy Spirit in that unity of essence. The statement asserts the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then emphasizes the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit.’

6. The Holy Spirit comes from the Father, and is sent by the Father and the Son. (pg. 28)

As you can see, there is a lot of Scriptural evidence conveying that the Spirit is fully God. But how does the Spirit relate with the other members of the Godhead and with creation? And while we’re asking questions, why is the Holy Spirit spoken of as the third person of the Trinity and not the first or second? Does this mean that God the Spirit is less than God the Father or God the Son?

In relation to the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the same in substance and equal in power and glory. There is an ontological unity – a unity of being or essence – among the Godhead.

“But,” someone might ask, “Why do Christians refer to God the Father as the first person and the Son as the second person and the Spirit as the third person, if not to show an order of superiority between them? Even in their names, wouldn’t the “Father” have preeminence over the “Son?”

This is a good question. However, the answer is not found in a difference of supremacy between the members of the Godhead, as though one was of greater essence or “more God” than the others. Priority of order does not necessarily mean superiority. Instead, the answer is found in the different function that each person of the Trinity has.

The Son and Spirit are equal to the Father in deity and being, but they are subordinate in their roles. The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to creation.

Throughout Scripture we see distinctions between the activities of the members of the Trinity. Notice the role of the Spirit in the following passages:

- In John 14:16, Jesus says, **“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you – the Spirit of truth...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.”**
- Jesus, in John 15:26, says **“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.”**

The New Testament teaches that the Father *and* the Son “send” the Holy Spirit, and that the Son “breathed” and “poured out” the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit freely and willingly agreed to be sent by the Father and the Son. Thus, the Holy Spirit proceeds out of the heavenly realms to accomplish and complete the eternal purposes of God.

One important implication of this is how this reality shapes our relationships as humans. The Bible teaches that when it comes to the relationship between husband and wife, they are equal in value and

dignity, but have different roles. That distinction in human relationships is reflected in the Godhead. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul writes, **“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”**

The head of Christ is God the Father; the Father and Son send the Spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit are equally God; equal in dignity and value, none less than God, but each have different in roles. As people made in the image of God, one way we reflect what God is like is by embracing that type of distinction and unity.

The Holy Spirit is consistently represented in Scripture as fully divine. The more pertinent issue relative to the Holy Spirit, though, and the doctrine of the Trinity is whether the Bible represents the Holy Spirit not only as personal but also a person, distinct from the persons of the Father and the Son. So we turn now to the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Questions or Comments?

III. THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (PG. 29)

What do we mean when we talk about the Holy Spirit as a Person. Well, we do not mean that the Holy Spirit is a human person that we just cannot see. The only person of the Godhead taking humanity upon Himself is Christ. What we do mean is that the Holy Spirit has personal subsistence. He is an intelligent, voluntary, living being, with understanding and will.

We have said earlier that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. While being one with the Father and the Son, there is a distinction made between the three. For example, Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:27), and this naturally indicates a distinction between the Holy Spirit and God the Father to whom the intercession is made.

This is different from a false view of God that is called “modalism.” (mode-alism) Modalism claims that God is not really three distinct persons, but only one person who appears to people in three different modes at different times. So for example, in the Old Testament God appeared as the Father, in the Gospels God appeared as the Son, and after Pentecost God appeared as the Spirit. This view does what so many other false views do by trying to make the mystery of the Trinity completely understandable. Yet, this view falls short due to all of the examples where we see the members of the Trinity interacting with each other. Was Jesus’ praying to the Father merely a charade? How could the Spirit descend on the Son when he was baptized?

In the early church, some denied that the Spirit was a separate personal entity. Instead, they said that the Spirit was more like an “essence” or an influence or energy from God the Father. His place in the Trinity has been questioned in light of these ideas, so it is important to establish the Spirit’s “personality” – His defined separate identity.

There are three Biblical reasons to conclude the Holy Spirit is a person, just as God the Father is a person, and just as the Lord Jesus Christ is a person:

1. Personal pronouns (pg. 29)

The first reason to conclude the Holy Spirit is a person is that personal pronouns are used of Him and that he makes statements in the first person. Consider Acts 10:19-20; **“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”** A little later in Acts 13:2, at the

church in Antioch we have this episode: **“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for *me* Barnabas and Saul for the work to which *I* have called them.”**

When Jesus and the Apostles speak of the Holy Spirit they always use personal pronouns: He, Him, Himself. This also testifies to the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

2. Personal Properties (pg. 29)

The second reason to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person is from the personal properties that are ascribed to Him, such as understanding or wisdom, will, and power. The operation of His will, for example, is seen in I Corinthians 12:11, **“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.”** Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Not merely Comfort but the Comforter. The Holy Spirit has these personal characteristics.

3. Personal Activities (pg. 29)

The third reason to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person is because personal activities are ascribed to Him. Scripture says that he speaks. Revelation 2:7 states, **“To him who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches....”** The Holy Spirit reveals, he guides into all truth, he teaches. In John 14:26, Jesus says of the Spirit, **“he will teach you all things.”** The Holy Spirit comforts, counsels, helps, and loves the believer. Romans 15:30 says, **“I urge you, brothers, by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit....”** The Holy Spirit encourages, he warns, he appoints to office, he may be grieved, may be lied to, may be resisted, and may be blasphemed.

In all of these things we see the clear personality, or distinct identity, of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Sound exegesis requires that the Holy Spirit be regarded as a person and not as a power or force. To say the Holy Spirit is merely a power would render many passages to be illogical. For example, what Luke says in 4:14, **“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit”** would have to be translated **“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the power of God.”**

Questions or Comments?