

DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Proof of The Holy Spirit as a Person

Lesson 2

One of the foundational issues concerning the Holy Spirit is His personhood. Some have taught that the Holy Spirit is a force, energy or influence, but not a person. Yet, if this is true, the Holy Spirit couldn't be God since God is a person. It would also mean the Scriptures are in error because they refer to the Holy Spirit as a person. In this study we will examine the personhood of the Holy Spirit and consider how this doctrine applies to our lives.

I. DEFINITION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PERSON

- A. Charles Ryrie in *The Holy Spirit* has said, "If personality may be simply described as possession of intellect, emotions (or sensibility), and will, then it is easily demonstrated that the Holy Spirit has personality because He has intelligence, emotions, and will."¹
- B. G. Campbell Morgan in *Understanding the Holy Spirit* has said, "God alone has perfect personality . . . Four things are contained within the realm of personality — Will, Intelligence, Power, and Capacity for Love. A person is a being who can be approached, trusted or doubted, loved or hated, adored or insulted. These essential parts of personality are limited in human beings: the will has its limitations, the intelligence has its limitations, power has its limitations, love has its limitations."²
- C. J. C. Ryle in *Old Paths*, commented, "I am unable to comprehend how any unprejudiced reader of the Bible can regard the Spirit as nothing more than "an influence or principle." We find it written in the New Testament, that the Holy Ghost was "seen descending in a bodily shape." (Luke 3:22.) He commanded disciples to do acts, and lifted them through the air by His own power. (Acts 8:29-39.) He sent forth the first preachers to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:2.) He spoke to the Churches. (Revelation 2:7.) He makes intercession. (Romans 8:26.) He searches all things, teaches all things, and guides into all truth. (1 Corinthians 2:10; John 14:26; John 16:13.) He is another Comforter distinct from Christ. (John 14:16.) He has personal affections ascribed to Him. (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30; Romans 15:30.) He has a mind, will, and power of His own. (Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 15:13.) He has baptism administered in His name together with the Father and the Son. (Matthew 28:19.) And whosoever shall blaspheme Him hath never forgiveness, and is in danger of eternal damnation. (Mark 3:29.)"³

¹ Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, pgs. 13-14.

² G. Campbell Morgan, *Understanding the Holy Spirit*, pg. 10.

³ Ryle, J. C. (2011-06-16). *Old Paths* (Kindle Locations 3713-3720). Heritage Bible Fellowship. Kindle Edition.

- D. John Owen argues only one point in favor of the Holy Spirit, namely it is impossible to prove the Father or Son is a person without also proving the Holy Spirit is a person. He goes on to give an analogy. “If a wise and honest man should come and tell you, that in a certain country where he has been, there is an excellent governor, who wisely discharges the duties of his office; who hears causes, discerns right, distributes justice, relieves the poor, and comforts the distressed; would you not believe that he intended by this description, a righteous, wise, diligent, intelligent person? What else could any man living imagine?” Owen goes on to argue that the Holy Spirit is described in these very same ways in the pages of Scripture.⁴

II. SCRIPTURAL PROOF THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

A. Early Old Testament allusions to the Trinity

1. **Gen. 1:2** 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.
2. **Gen. 1:26** Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”
3. **Gen. 3:22** Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—
4. **Gen. 11:7** “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”
5. Why does God refer to Himself in the first person plural in the last three references above?

B. The Holy Spirit has Qualities of Personality

1. **Intellect**
 - a. **Isa. 11:2** The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (The Holy Spirit has wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge.)

⁴John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, pgs. 42-43.

- b. **Rom. 8:27** and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (The Holy Spirit has a mind.)

To deny that there is any allusion to a person in such references to the Spirit, betrays either deep-seated bias and prejudice, or lack of exegetical aptitude and capacity. (George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, pg. 102.)

- c. **I Cor. 2:10-11, 13** For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. . . 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God.)

2. The Holy Spirit Has Emotions

Eph. 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (The Holy Spirit can be grieved.)

3. The Holy Spirit Has a Will

- a. **Acts 16:6** They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Holy Spirit told Paul not to speak in Asia.)
- b. **I Cor. 12:11** But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (The Holy Spirit gives gifts as He wills.)

4. The Holy Spirit Acts Like a Person

- a. **Gen. 6:3** Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." (The Holy Spirit strives with men.)

The most tangible and conclusive evidence for the personality of the Holy Spirit is found in His works. The very character of His works makes it impossible to interpret the Scriptures properly without assuming His personality. . . All the Works of the Holy Spirit are such that personality is required. (John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pg. 6)

- b. **Luke 12:12** for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (The Holy Spirit teaches.)

- c. **John 14:26** “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (The Holy Spirit teaches and brings to remembrance.)
- d. **John 15:26** “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me. (The Holy Spirit bears witness.)
- e. **John 16:7-8** “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.)
- f. **Acts 8:29, 39** Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”. . . 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. (The Holy Spirit spoke, gave instruction, snatched Philip away.)
- g. **Acts 13:2, 4** While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”. . . 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (The Holy Spirit calls people to certain ministries, sends people to certain places.)
- h. **Rom. 8:14, 16, 26** For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. . . 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, . . . 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (The Holy Spirit leads, bears witness, helps us, intercedes for us in prayer.)
- i. **I Cor. 6:11** Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (The Holy Spirit washes, sanctifies, and justifies believers.)
- j. **I Tim. 4:1** But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. (The Holy Spirit gives revelation.)

5. The Holy Spirit Can Be Related to as a Person

- a. **Psa. 51:11** Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. (The Holy Spirit can be relationally present or absent.)
- b. **Matt. 12:31-32** “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (The Holy Spirit can be sinned against, blasphemed, and spoken against.)
- c. **Acts 5:3, 9** But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? . . . 9 Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.” (The Holy Spirit can be lied to.)
- d. **Acts 7:51** “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. (The Holy Spirit can be resisted.)
- e. **Acts 10:19-21** While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 “But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.” 21 Peter went down to the men and said, “Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?” (The Holy Spirit can talk to people.)
- f. **Heb. 10:29** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (We can insult the Holy Spirit.)

C. The Holy Spirit is Compared or Associated With Other Persons

1. **Matt. 28:19** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity.)

2. **John 16:14** “He [the Holy Spirit vs. 13] will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. (The Holy Spirit reveals truth and glorifies Jesus.)
3. **Acts 15:28** “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials. (The Holy Spirit gives His opinion with the apostles.)
4. **II Cor. 13:14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (The Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity.)

He is introduced as a person so often, not merely in poetic or excited discourse, but in simple narrative, and in didactic instructions; and his personality is sustained by so many collateral proofs, that to explain the use of the personal pronouns in relation to Him on the principle of personification is to do violence to all the rules of interpretation. (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pg. 524)

III. ERRORS CONCERNING THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- A. The Holy Spirit is the “exerted energy of God” (Arian, Socinian, and Sabellian heresies).⁵
- B. The Holy Spirit has no personality and is the same as Jehovah (Christian Science).⁶
- C. It is an error to focus so intently on the work of the Spirit that we begin to think of the Spirit as a supernatural phenomena, an action, or predictable response, to be distilled into a creed to be recited.
- D. We must be careful not to interpret the personifications as literal and then use those literal interpretations to prove the Holy Spirit isn't a person e.g. the Spirit is described as being “poured forth.” You can't pour a person, therefore the Holy Spirit is not a person. This is an example of bad interpretation used to set up a false inference which in turn is used to create a faulty syllogism.

In the history of the church, opponents of the personality of the Holy Spirit have found it necessary also to deny the inspiration and accuracy of the Word of God in order to sustain their teaching. (John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pg. 6.)

IV. APPLICATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PERSONHOOD

- A. We can have a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

⁵ Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, pg. 13.

⁶ Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, pg. 146.

- B. We can know the Holy Spirit.
- C. We can submit to the Holy Spirit.
- D. We can trust the Holy Spirit.
- E. We can ask for power from the Holy Spirit.
- F. We can know that the Holy Spirit has a good purpose for everything He does, even when we do not understand it.
- G. The Holy Spirit, being a person, has emotions, feelings, desires, and love for us which is a comfort in trying times.
- H. We know that the Holy Spirit has plans for us.
- I. We know the Holy Spirit wants to work in and through us.

**Every virtue we possess
And every victory won
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone ⁷**

⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All About the Holy Spirit*, pg. 25.