

God, the Holy Spirit

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My brother Dave was the area supervisor of several gas stations. Every day he visited each of his stores. One morning he left early and started for the farthest store on his route. Dave was feeling depressed, and with no one in the car with him, he had few distractions from his feelings. The emptiness of his life troubled him. The road trip was getting miserable.

Then suddenly, Dave said he heard a voice, an audible voice! Someone in that car said, “Jesus loves you!” In shock, my brother turned to his right. He saw no one. Who was that? Was it God? “Forgive me!” Dave cried out. Then something happened in his heart. God gave him the assurance right then that he was a new creature in Christ.

Discovering that he no longer wanted the cigarettes in his front pocket, Dave threw them onto the car floor to be thrown away when he reached his destination. When he got home that night, he poured out the alcohol from the bar in his basement. He gathered his family around the dining room table and told them that things would be different in their home. And they were. That was over twenty years ago, and my brother is still a strong Christian.

Now my question is: who spoke to my brother going down the highway? Was it an angel? Was it Jesus? Was it Dave’s imagination? I believe the voice Dave heard that morning was the voice of the Holy Spirit. Why does He speak? He speaks (though usually not audibly) because He is a Person, because He is God, and because His work is to bring each of us into a delightful, personal relationship with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit Is a Person

The Holy Spirit can speak (Acts 8:29, 11:12, 13:2)—though some people don’t think the Holy Spirit can speak because they think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, or simply a presence. For instance, a Jehovah’s Witness might say something like this:

The holy spirit is not a person and it is not a part of a Trinity. The holy spirit is God’s active force that he uses to accomplish his will. . . . To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity.¹

The Jehovah’s Witness sees the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. Maybe you, too, have trouble thinking of the Holy Spirit as a real person. After all, He doesn’t have a physical body like Jesus does. But He is a person who has eternally lived in an intimate relationship with God the Father and God the Son. And now He invites each of us to participate in that dynamic relationship of love.

Biblical Proof that the Holy Spirit is a Person

A real person has the attributes of personality, which include mind, will, and emotions. Does the Holy Spirit have a will? He distributes spiritual gifts to Christians “as He wills.”² Does the Holy Spirit have a mind? He “searches . . . the deep things of God” and knows them.³ Does the Holy Spirit have emotions? We are told to “grieve not the Holy Spirit.”⁴ If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, then He has emotions. Because the Holy Spirit has a mind, a will, and emotions, we know that He is a Person.⁵

A real person also has the capacity to have relationships with others. That’s the primary reason we have mind, will, and emotions. According to Philippians 2:1, the Spirit is able to have fellowship with us.⁶ According to 2 Corinthians 13:14, the Holy Spirit can have communion with us.⁷ One who is able to commune and to have fellowship is capable of personal relationships. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is a person.

What This Means For You

Understand that the Holy Spirit is a real Person, not just a force or a presence or a power. You must recognize Him as a Person. He can speak.⁸ He is praying for you, just as Christ is praying for you.⁹ He will teach you what you need to know. He will guide you in your decisions. He tells you that you are a child of God.¹⁰ He will personally clean up the “rooms” of your innermost being when you let Him. You can submit to His voice or reject His voice. If you disobey His voice, He will be grieved. Respecting the Holy Spirit as a person is necessary for your relationship with Him.

Listening to the Spirit

Take time to listen for the Spirit. Don't wait for an audible voice—He rarely speaks audibly—but listen as He speaks through the Word. Learn to understand what many call “the prompts” and “the checks” of the Spirit. You can experience these because the Spirit, as a divine Person, has taken a personal interest in you. Have you ever thanked Him for that?

The Holy Spirit is God

The Holy Spirit is the all-knowing, all-seeing, everywhere-present God. Acts 5:3–4 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is God. Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Before Ananias was struck dead, Peter told him, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men; but to God.” From this event we can see that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God; therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.

There is more Scriptural evidence that the Holy Spirit is God. We see from the Bible that:

- The words of God are the words the Holy Spirit inspired.¹¹
- We are the temple of God because the Spirit indwells us.¹²
- The one born of the Spirit is said to be born of God.¹³

The Holy Spirit is God Himself, the third Person of the divine Trinity. Why is it so important to believe in the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit? It is crucial because you cannot give Him the honor and respect that He deserves if you don't consider Him a divine Person. In fact, I find it doubtful that someone can be saved while he denies the personhood and deity of the One who tries to draw him to salvation.¹⁴

The Holy Spirit is Distinct from the Father and the Son

One person I talked to declared, “The Holy Spirit is Jesus.” Some people think that the Holy Spirit is actually the same Person as the Father and the Son. But the Scriptures clearly teach a distinction between the Persons of the Trinity. For example, again and again in John 14–16, Jesus referred to a Helper (“Comforter” in the King James Version) that He would send when He went back to the Father.¹⁵ This Helper would guide the disciples and teach them.¹⁶ If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were one and the same Person, Jesus's reference to the Holy Spirit as another Helper would not make sense. Jesus must have been referring to another Person distinct from Himself.

Look at the account of Jesus's baptism.¹⁷ Here the Son is baptized; a voice from Heaven says, “This is my beloved Son”; and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rests upon Jesus. All of this occurs simultaneously. All three of the members of the Trinity are seen here at the same time, obviously distinct from one another.

As a distinct person, the Holy Spirit has lived in a loving relationship with the Father and Son from all eternity. God created us to participate in that love relationship. God wants us to enjoy fellowship with Him,¹⁸ as each member of the Trinity has enjoyed fellowship with each other from before the beginning of time.¹⁹

The Spirit is at Work in the World and in your Heart Today

The Holy Spirit speaks to us because He is the third Person of the Trinity, sent by the Father and the Son to work in our hearts.²⁰ The Holy Spirit was active in creation.²¹ He inspired the Holy Scriptures.²² So, what does He do today? He convicts the world of sin.²³ He regenerates the repentant believer²⁴ and gives assurance to those of us who are saved.²⁵ He sanctifies us.²⁶ He fills us with His presence.²⁷ He gives us power to live holy lives²⁸ and to be witnesses for God.²⁹ He helps us understand the Bible.³⁰ He enables us to exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit.”³¹ He gives gifts to each member of the church so that each of us in the “body” can contribute as the Spirit desires.³² He “seals” us for the day of redemption, guaranteeing our inheritance in heaven.³³

Personal Application

Are you allowing God the Holy Spirit to work in your life? Are you letting Him sanctify you? Has He given you power to be an effective witness? Are you manifesting the “fruit of the Spirit?” Have you discovered the spiritual gifts that the Spirit has given you? Are you letting Him use you in the body of Christ?

The Holy Spirit wants to take up personal residence inside us. We can have a joyful life filled with the presence of the Spirit. We should listen carefully for the Spirit, for He loves to encourage and empower those who are willing to obey His voice as they study Scripture.

Footnotes

1. *Should you believe in the Trinity?*, 1989. New York: The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
2. 1 Corinthians 12:11 “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”
3. 1 Corinthians 2:10 “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”

4. Ephesians 4:30.
5. Here are other passages that describe the Holy Spirit doing something that only a person could do: Acts 8:28, 16:6; Matthew 10:16–20; Romans 8:26.
6. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit”
7. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
8. Acts 8:29 “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’”
9. Romans 8:26 “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”
10. Romans 8:15–16 “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
11. 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”; 2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”
12. 1 Corinthians 6:19 “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom ye have from God, and you are not your own?”
13. John 3:5–8. In Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus, He said that it is necessary to “be born of water and the Spirit.” Further He said, “You must be born again.” Then He referred to the one who has been born again as “born of the Spirit.”
14. Matthew 12:31.
15. John 15:26 “But 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.” John 16:7 “Nevertheless 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 depart, I will send Him to you.”
16. John 16:13 “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.”
17. Mark 1:10–11 “And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”
18. 1 John 1:4 “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Philippians 2:1 “Fellowship of the Spirit [with us].”
19. In John 17:22–23, Jesus speaks of the communion He has with the Father and would like to have with us: “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”
20. Romans 8:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22.
21. Genesis 1:2 “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”
22. According to 2 Peter 1:21, the prophets were moved upon by the Holy Spirit when they wrote the Scriptures. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, the Bible is actually God-breathed. The Bible was inspired in such a way that the words of Scripture are actually the very words of God.
23. John 16:8 “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”
24. Titus 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”
25. Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
26. 1 Peter 1:2 “. . . sanctification of the Spirit.”
27. Acts 2:4 “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Ephesians 5:18 “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”
28. Ephesians 3:16 “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”
29. Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
30. 1 Corinthians 2:14 “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
31. Galatians 5:22 “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”
32. There are four groupings of spiritual gifts (gifts of the Spirit). They are in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; 1 Corinthians 12:29–30; Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4:11.
33. Ephesians 4:30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”