

The Personality of the Spirit

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Holy Spirit is a Person, a Divine Person, with all the attributes and works of Divinity, and His personality and Divinity are essential to the system of revealed religion.

Scripture: Matthew 12:31, John 14:26

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Trinity"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the necessity of understanding the personality of the Holy Spirit and His relation to the Trinity to grasp His mission and work. He argues that the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence but a Divine Person with attributes of will, intelligence, power, and love, which are infinite in Him compared to the finite nature of humanity. Morgan addresses historical heresies that have diminished the understanding of the Spirit's personality and divinity, asserting that the Scriptures affirm the Holy Spirit's role as a distinct Person within the Godhead. He highlights the importance of recognizing the Holy Spirit's divine attributes and works, which are essential to the Christian faith. Ultimately, denying the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit undermines the entire framework of revealed religion.

Transcript

Before attempting to consider the work of the Holy Spirit through the history of the human race, it is necessary to understand, so far as it is possible, His personality and His relation to the Trinity. Only by a clear understanding of what the Scriptures teach concerning these matters, will it be at all possible to comprehend the mission and work of the Spirit.

Not that it is possible to perfectly understand the personality of the Spirit or His relation to the Trinity. These things are beyond the complete comprehension of minds that are finite. They must be accepted as declarations of a Divine revelation, the final explanation being impossible. It is possible and necessary to discover what the Scriptures of truth have declared about the Spirit in these two respects.

This chapter deals with the first point, the personality of the Spirit, under two divisions.

I. The Holy Spirit a Person.

II. The Holy Spirit a Divine Person.

The term Person immediately introduces an insurmountable difficulty—that, namely, of attempting to express the Infinite in finite terms. It has been argued that personality and absolute existence are

contradictions; that God cannot be, at one and the same time, a Person and Infinite. That argument is based upon the assumption that the term Person is capable of concise and final definition.

That is a false assumption. It supposes that perfect personality exists in a human being. This is not so. God alone has perfect personality. That of every other being is limited. In other words, God is not a magnified man, rather it may be said that man is a limited god. God is not in the image of man: man is in the image of God. Although, at first, it may appear as though this were a mere play upon words, yet a careful consideration of the statement will prove that no final and definite deductions concerning God can be made from a study of human life.

If man is the one, the final, the absolute unit, then the argument holds that God cannot be a Person and Infinite. If He alone be final and absolute, then personality in man is to be looked upon as being imperfect and limited. When a man declares God cannot be absolute and a Person, he does so because his only view of personality is the view which he has of himself or of his brother. It is possible to form some conception of Divine personality by a study of the human, because men are made in the likeness of God; but wherever the endeavour is made to build up the Divine from the suggestion given in man, it must be remembered that the factors of personality in man are finite, while in God they are infinite.

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.

It is not unthinkable that there may be illimitable will, intelligence, power, and love, and that yet the personality shall remain. Neither is it unthinkable= that there may be a Being Who can be approached, trusted or doubted, loved or hated, adored or insulted, having all these elements of personality in infinite measure. Granted that in the Divine there are to be found the elements that exist in other rational beings, it is surely not unthinkable that these may be infinite in the Divine, while yet they are finite in man.

The Christian position is that it is perfectly easy to understand that man, within a circumscribed area, is a picture of the Divine; but that yet, by so much as he is circumscribed and limited, he is not himself Divine. In this sense man was made in the image of God; but that of which he is the image is like him, yet unlike him. It is unlike him in the fact that all that is found in man of essential majesty and grandeur in limited degree, is to be found in God Himself unlimited and illimitable. The Holy Spirit, then, is a Person, possessed of Will, Intelligence, Power, and Capacity for Love.

In the third century of the Christian era, Paul of Samosata advanced a theory denying the Divinity of Christ, and regarding the Holy Spirit as an influence, as an exertion of a Divine energy and power. He attempted to finally explain the terms of the New Testament and of Scripture; and in his attempt to say the last definite, formulated word, he found he must cut away certain supernatural mysteries that surrounded the doctrine of God as contained in revelation ; and declared that there was no Trinity, that Jesus was not Divine, and that the Spirit was simply the influence moving out from God, the energy of God exerted upon other people. About the time of the Reformation two men, Laelius Socinus, and his nephew Faustus Socinus, revived the theory, and many accepted it.

The growth and decay of what is known as direct Socinianism is not the subject now under consideration. These facts in the history of the Church are mentioned in order that it may be understood whence came the teaching, the influence of which was like leaven, spreading far more widely through the Church than

the circle of those who actually called themselves Socinians. This circle of people had a well-defined doctrine to teach. The great mass of Christian people refused to accept the doctrine; but, alas! passed unconsciously under its chilling influence, and unknowingly almost the whole Church came to think of the Spirit of God as an influence, if not to speak of Him as such!

In the Authorized Version the personal pronoun which refers to the Holy Spirit is translated by the neuter it, an index of the trend of thought among "Christian people. Men prayed of the Spirit as of it, an influence, an energy, proving that the Socinian thought had chilled the zeal and the enthusiasm of Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit.

One of the most remarkable signs in the present time of the revival of the truth of the personality of the Spirit, is the reintroduction in the Revised Version of the masculine pronoun wherever the Spirit is referred to. In that apparently simple and insignificant matter there is a clear revelation of the fact that God is calling His people everywhere to a recognition of this most important doctrine of the personality of the Spirit.

A list of the passages containing the references of Jesus to the Holy Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Gospel of John will be found as a footnote. Let them be carefully perused? There are two lines of teaching which run through these utterances. First, the most solemn warning ever uttered in the hearing of men had reference to the Holy Spirit. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Christ affirms that His own words may be rejected, that His own Person may be spoken against, and that these things shall be forgiven to the sons of men; but that they who refuse the teaching of the Spirit can find no forgiveness, because the final apostasy of such, the final turning of the back upon the work and mission of the Spirit, constitutes what our Lord speaks of as eternal sin. Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin—a deep, searching, and awful thought. The man who can sin against the Holy Spirit, refusing His teaching, deliberately turning his back upon, and his will against, the message of the Holy Spirit, is in danger of passing into a realm in which his sin is not temporary and transient, but is eternal and abiding. Such were the most awfully solemn words which fell from our Lord's lips. It is not conceivable that a man should sin against a mere influence or energy, so as to bring himself into danger of eternal sin. There is in every word of the warning evidence of an assumption in the mind of Christ of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John contains Christ's systematic teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. He speaks of Him as the Paraclete. This is the title of a Person. It is indeed one of the incommunicable, untranslatable words of Scripture. Neither Comforter nor Advocate fully expresses its meaning. Both, and even something beyond, would be required to do this. Much would have been gained if no attempt had been made at translation, the word itself becoming the most familiar name of the Spirit.

In these discourses, when speaking of the Paraclete, Jesus does not, in one single instance, use a word which can be construed as indicating thought of the Spirit as an influence. He shall teach, He shall bear witness, He shall convict, He shall guide. These activities attributed to the Holy Spirit must be the activities, not of an influence depending upon another and separate will, but the activities of a Person, of One Who unites within His own Being all the essential elements of personality, Will, Intelligence, Power, and Love. Whether in the solemn warnings of the Synoptic Gospels, or in the teachings concerning the mission of the Spirit in the Gospel of John, the fact is most evidently set forth, that in the mind of Christ the Holy Spirit was thought of, not as an influence, an energy merely, but as One capable of exercising functions and doing deeds which were impossible to any other than a Person.

Again, the Holy Spirit is not only a Person, but a Divine Person. Another heresy arose in the Church in the fourth century. Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, taught that God is one eternal Person; that He created a Being infinitely superior to the angels, His only begotten Son; that this only begotten Son of God did in His turn exercise His supernatural power by the creation of a third Person, that third Person being the Holy Spirit.

The difference between Socinianism and Arianism lies in the recognition by the latter of the personality of the Spirit, while denying His proper Deity. According to Arius, the Holy Spirit is a Person, a created Person; and if created, then not Creator; and if not Creator, then not Divine. The Nicene Creed was drawn up and adopted as a corrective to this error of Arianism, which had obtained a firm hold in the early Church.

Most assuredly the Scriptures teach not only the personality of the Spirit, but His Divine personality. The unity of two passages in the Old and New Testaments throws light upon this subject.

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. . . . And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

The prophet had come into the presence of God, and was undone by the vision.

The New Testament contains an exposition of that vision of Isaiah.

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, saying,

Go thou unto this people, and say, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand.

Paul declared that it was the Holy Spirit Who uttered the words which Isaiah distinctly says were spoken by the Divine Being. Thus the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New reveals the fact of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

A new covenant was promised long before the coming of the Messiah. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the old promise of the covenant of Jehovah is identified with the new dispensation of the Spirit. It is evident that the Persons at first sight apparently different are identical, and that the Spirit spoken of in Hebrews comes in fulfillment of the prophecy uttered by Jeremiah.

Again, the works attributed to the Holy Spirit must be the works of Divinity. Genesis declares that out of the chaos, cosmos was brought by His brooding and force. In the Gospel of John regeneration is declared to be His work. Paul distinctly states that God will quicken our mortal bodies through the Spirit. Creation, regeneration, resurrection, these are works which can only be brought about by infinite power, and therefore the Spirit is not only a Person, but a Divine Person.

Omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, attributes that appertain only to God, are all attributed to the Spirit.

The Scriptures then teach that the Holy Spirit is a Person, having all the Divine attributes and able to do all Divine works. The mystery is acknowledged, and it is very profound. To finally explain it is impossible; but this impossibility of explanation is to be accounted for by human limitation and by the fact that the finite

can never grasp the Infinite. The facts must be reverently accepted as forming an integral and necessary part of the system of revealed religion. To deny the personality of the Spirit, and to deny the Divine personality of the Spirit, must eventuate-as it has done in every system where it has been attempted-in denial of the Divinity of the Son, and in the denial of the Divinity of the Son there must also be included -as there always has been-a denial of the atoning work of the Son. The doctrines of the Son-His Cross and Passion-and of the Spirit-His personality and Divinity-are closely connected, and one cannot be interfered with without detriment to the other. Denying these truths, the whole fabric of revealed religion breaks down.

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