

# Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit

by Greg Herrick

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*The Holy Spirit is a person, deity, and active force in creation, revelation, and the lives of believers.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 1:18, John 3:8, John 7:37, John 14:16, Acts 2:3, Acts 5:3, 1 Corinthians 12:11, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:14, Ephesians 4:30

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Pneumatology"

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## Description

Greg Herrick delves into the term 'pneumatology,' which focuses on the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, covering aspects like the personality and deity of the Spirit, as well as his work throughout Scripture. The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the Holy Spirit as a divine person, distinct from mere 'active force,' and explores various biblical evidence supporting the Spirit's personhood and deity. It also discusses Scriptural metaphors for the Holy Spirit, highlighting his roles as an enabler, comforter, and guide in the lives of believers.

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## Transcript

The term pneumatology comes from two Greek words, namely, pneuma meaning "wind," "breath," or "spirit" (used of the Holy Spirit) and logos meaning "word," "matter," or "thing." As it is used in Christian systematic theology, "pneumatology" refers to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Generally this includes such topics as the personality of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture.

### The Personhood of the Holy Spirit

The personality (and therefore "personhood") of the Holy Spirit has been denied by certain groups throughout the history of the church. Some point out that the noun for "spirit" in the NT is pneuma which is neuter and, therefore, the spirit is correctly referred to as "it" rather than "he." In keeping with this idea, some refer to it [him] as "God's active force," almost in a Gnostic sense of an emanation from the one, true God. Before we look at the Biblical evidence, it is important to point out that there is no necessary connection in Koine Greek between grammatical gender and personal gender so it is simply false to say that since the Greek noun pneuma is neuter the spirit must be an "it."

It is important, then, to see what the Scriptures say about his personhood, i.e., is he really a person, albeit divine? This is especially so in a culture moving more toward New Age thinking and pantheism. The Holy Spirit is not the "god" within us which we possess via our own natures, nor is he some amorphous feeling

or "active force." All these views denigrate him and rightly deserve rejection.

There are several lines of evidence in the NT which argue for the personality of the Holy Spirit. First, Jesus said he would send "another" in his place (John 14:16). The word for another is *allos* in Greek and refers to another just like Jesus. It is reasonable to conclude from this that the Spirit is a person since Jesus is clearly a person. Further, Jesus referred to him as a *parakletos* (enabler, encourager, comforter, etc.) which requires that he be a person since the functions of a *parakletos* are personal; Jesus functioned as a *parakletos* to the disciples.

Second, the fact that the Spirit makes choices (1 Cor 12:11), teaches (John 14:26), guides (John 16:13), reveals Jesus (John 16:14), convicts (John 16:8), seals believers (2 Cor 1:21-22), can be grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed (Matt 12:31), possesses a rational mind (Rom 8:26-27; 1 Cor 2:11-13), can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4), quenched (1 Thess 5:19), resisted (Acts 7:51), and on numerous occasions is distinguished from, yet directly linked with the Father and the Son as co-worker and co-recipient of worship, argues definitively for his personhood (Matt 28:19-20; 2 Cor 13:14).<sup>16</sup>

### The Deity of the Holy Spirit

As we noted above, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from, yet closely related to, the Father and the Son--and that on an equal basis. He receives the worship due the Father and the Son (2 Cor 13:14) and does divine works, including inspiring Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt 19:4-5), regenerating hearts (Titus 3:5), and creating, sustaining, and giving life to all things (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29-30). He is said to be eternal (Heb 9:14; only God is eternal), omniscient (1 Cor 2:10-11), and is actually referred to as God (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19-20). There is very little room for doubt; clearly the Holy Spirit is divine.

### Scriptural Metaphors for the Holy Spirit

Scripture uses several important metaphorical expressions to refer to the Spirit, his sovereign character and his inscrutable, yet manifested workings. For example, Jesus referred to him as a wind--a metaphor which seems to underline the inscrutable nature of his moving in the hearts of people to give them life and bring them to faith (John 3:8).

In connection with his personal and glorious ministry to people, Jesus referred to him as water in John 7:37-39. This symbol portrays the Spirit as the One who can fulfill the deepest longings of the heart to know God, i.e., to enjoy eternal life (John 4:14; 17:3). As such, the metaphor speaks of promised messianic blessing and the presence of the kingdom in a new and powerful way (Isa 12:3; 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Zech 14:16-18; Joel 2:28-32; Sukk 5:55a).

In Matthew 3:16 (cf. Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) the text refers to the Spirit descending out of heaven as a dove. The symbol of the "dove" probably represents the beginning of an age of blessing and the end of judgment or perhaps it symbolizes the beginning of a new creation through the work of the promised, Spirit-empowered Davidic messiah.<sup>17</sup>

Another metaphor for the Spirit is clothing (Acts 1:8). This idea involves being dressed by another person so that one is characterized by this new clothing. In the case of the Spirit, it refers to his gift of power to us so that we might live consistent with the gospel as we boldly preach it throughout the entire world.

The Spirit is also referred to as a guarantee or pledge of the Christian's glorification (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:21-22). In this case, the present gift of the Spirit is the guarantee that the totality of what has been promised to us will someday be fulfilled (Rom 8:30). BAGD (the standard Greek lexicon used in NT studies) refers to the "Spirit" in these passages as the "first installment, deposit, down payment, [or] pledge, that pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid."<sup>18</sup>

Closely related to the idea of the Spirit as "pledge" is the Spirit as seal or the One with whom Christians are sealed by God. In 2 Cor 1:22 and Ephesians 1:14, 4:30, Christians are said to be "sealed" by the Spirit of God. A "seal" in the ancient world referred to a "mark (with a seal) as a means of identification so that the mark which denotes ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner (see Rev 7:3)...This forms a basis for understanding the symbolic expression which speaks of those who enter the Christian fellowship as being sealed with or by the Holy Spirit."<sup>19</sup> Thus the "sealing" of the Spirit speaks to the divine ownership of the Christian which translates into security and protection. This does not mean that the Christian will never sin or be chastened by God (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:1-11), but it does mean that God will never abandon them, neither in this life or the one to come (cf. Rom 8:38-39). We will discuss this more under "Soteriology" or "Salvation" below.

The Pentecost Spirit is also likened to tongues of fire in Acts 2:3. Fire represents the holy presence of God, as for example, in Exodus 3:2-5 and the "burning bush." One might also recall the pillar of fire (Exod 13:21-22), the fire on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:17) and the fire associated with the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 40:36-38).<sup>20</sup> In all these cases, the holiness of God is paramount. Now, recall that the Christian's election is unto holiness and Christlikeness (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4) and so the Spirit has taken up residence in our hearts to make this transformation a reality (2 Cor 3:18).

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation

The apostle Peter makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was responsible for the production of the OT scriptures (i.e., *graphe*,s) by carrying men along as they freely wrote God's message. Paul likewise asserts the Holy Spirit's involvement in the production of sacred Scripture (2 Tim 3:16--*theopneustos*). When we go to the OT we see this phenomenon in several places, not the least of which is the clear example of Ezekiel 2:2: "As he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and raised me to my feet and I heard him speaking to me" (see also 8:4; 11:1, 24). Other examples of the Spirit speaking to people include Balaam (Num 24:2) and Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10). Also, Jesus said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit (Matt 22:43; cf. Acts 2:30).<sup>21</sup>

There is not a great deal of discussion in either testament regarding the relationship between the Spirit and men during the production of Scripture. Peter uses the analogy of the wind filling the sails of a ship. So we may infer from this that the Spirit took the initiative and directed the work, but in no way suppressed the personalities, including the emotional and intellectual input, of the human authors. In fact, it appears that he used all of this (and more), for the spiritual/emotional/ethical experience of David writing lyric poetry (in the Psalms, for example) was not the same as Paul's experience in writing 1 Thessalonians or Ezra's experience in writing the book after his name or John writing Revelation. The fact that we have an intimate involvement of the Spirit of God with the writers of Scripture speaks not to mechanical dictation or even conceptual inspiration (cf. Gal 3:16), but instead to a divine-human concurrence (1 Cor 2:12-13).

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The work of the Spirit in the OT is much broader than just the production of Scripture, as important as that is. The Spirit was involved in creating the cosmos (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13). He is currently intricately involved in sustaining creation (Psa 104:29-30) and will someday, in a period of enormous divine blessing, completely renew it. The nature of the Spirit's present ministry testifies to this future work (Isa 32:15; Rom 8:18-27).

The Holy Spirit came upon certain people to impart wisdom and practical skills, strength and ability. He did this during the building of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and all the tabernacle's furnishings (Exod 31:1-11). He was also the strength and guidance behind the building of the temple (Zech 4:6).

The Spirit was involved in the administration of the nation of Israel by giving gifts of administration and wisdom (Gen 41:38; Num 11:25; Deut 34:9). He also raised up national leaders during the dismal period of the Judges. He gave strength, courage, capability in war, and leadership abilities to several people (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:19). Later on he anointed Saul, David, and Solomon for leadership by giving them strength and ability to prophesy, but in the case of Saul, the Spirit subsequently withdrew because of his disobedience (1 Sam 10:10; 16:13).

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the regeneration (Ezek 36:26-28), instruction, and sanctification of Israel in the OT (Nehemiah 9:20; Psa 51:11; 143:10; Isa 63:10). It is also said that he will produce righteousness and justice among the people of God in the messianic age (Isa 11:2-5; 32:15-20).<sup>22</sup>

#### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Christ

The Holy Spirit was involved in the birth of Christ, with the result that Christ, while fully human, was completely sinless (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit was also involved in Christ's anointing for messianic service (i.e., at his baptism [Luke 3:21-22]), filled him during his temptations (Luke 4:1; John 3:34), and revealed the timing and nature of the beginning of that ministry (Luke 4:14, 18). The Holy Spirit was also responsible for Christ's ability to perform miracles and cast out demons (Matt 12:28). He was also involved in both the death of Christ as well as his resurrection (Heb 9:14; Rom 1:4; 8:11). Further, perhaps the best interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 is that the pre-incarnate Christ preached via the Spirit through the mouth of Noah to the wicked back in the days before the flood.<sup>23</sup>

#### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

We will discuss the various aspects of the work of the Spirit in relation to the church under the headings of "soteriology" and "ecclesiology." Suffice it to say here that the Spirit is involved in the works of calling, regeneration, uniting the believer with Christ, indwelling, filling, teaching, guiding, gifting, empowering, and sanctifying the believer. His primary ministry is to mediate the presence of Christ and the knowledge of God to the believer (John 16:13-14).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Some scholars attempt to argue for the personality of the Spirit by pointing out that in Ephesians 1:14 the relative pronoun "who" is masculine in the Greek text and not the expected neuter (i.e., to agree with *pneuma*). But there is a difficult textual variant here, i.e., the neuter relative pronoun, and it is exceedingly difficult to determine with great confidence which was original. The point is that not much weight should be placed on this passage. Also, some argue that the demonstrative pronoun in John 16:14 is masculine and refers back to the "spirit" in 16:13. The masculine pronoun, then, used in reference to the Spirit,

demonstrates his personality. This argument, too, is precarious at best.

17 See Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word, 1993), in loc.

18 BAGD, s.v. ajrrabwn.

19 BAGD, s.v. sfragivzw.

20 Others argue that "oil" is a type or symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. It represents the power, cleansing, and illuminating work of the Spirit. See Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989).

21 See Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 867.

22 This summary of the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT relies heavily on the work of Erickson, Christian Theology, 866-69. See also Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 95-99; and especially James I. Packer, "Holy Spirit," in New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 316-19.

23 See Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," A Biblical Theology of the New Testament, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 448-50.

24 J. I. Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 49.

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