

## § 6. Doctrine of God: Holy Spirit

### Lecture 1

#### Biblical Data

Today we begin a new section in Defenders class. Before we do so, let's step back and reconnoiter so that we see the big picture.

For the last year or so we've been studying the doctrine of God – the existence and nature of God. The first subject that we looked at under this general heading was the attributes of God. We looked at such properties as omniscience, omnipotence, aseity, eternity, holiness, love, and so on. Then we did an excursus on natural theology looking at arguments for God's existence such as the cosmological argument, the moral argument, the teleological argument, and then we looked at arguments against God's existence as well. Finally, most recently, we just finished a subsection on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Today we want to start with a new subsection of the doctrine of God – the Holy Spirit. Theologians often refer to this area as the area of pneumatology. That comes from the Greek word *pneuma* which means "spirit" or "wind." Obviously this is the word from which we get our word "pneumatic" as in a pneumatic drill or pneumatic hammer. We are going to be studying now pneumatology or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has rightly been called the forgotten person of the Trinity. When you look at the early post-apostolic fathers it seems that they were virtually binitarians rather than trinitarians. They believed in God the Father and his Word or *Logos* who proceeded from the Father. But there was almost nothing said about the person of the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian and Christological controversies that dominated the early church for centuries precluded any in-depth discussion of the person of the Holy Spirit. So, for example, in the Apostles' Creed, all you find with regard to the Holy Spirit is the statement, "I believe in the Holy Spirit" which begs the question – what do you believe about the Holy Spirit? In the Nicene Creed it is even briefer. After saying I believe in the Father and the Son and those persons are explained it says, "and in the Holy Spirit." He is sort of thrown in there at the end for good measure.

Even today I find that the Holy Spirit seems to be neglected by many Christians. For example, in my own seminary education one of the courses that we took as part of our core curriculum in the Master of Divinity program was a systematic theology course entitled, "God, Man, and Christ." When you think about it, that is very odd. Is that a new sort of unholy Trinity of God, man, and Christ? What happened to the Holy Spirit? He was sort of left out I'm afraid.

So we want to spend a little time talking about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. As such, he is co-equal with God the Father and with God the Son. The Holy Spirit is God. We've already looked at some of the verses on the deity of the Spirit but let's look at Acts 5:3-4 once again. There Peter says to Ananias who has attempted to keep some of the proceeds of the land that he sold,

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

So in verse 3 he says, "Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit" and then in verse 5 he says, "You have lied to God himself." So the Holy Spirit is God.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit is not the ghost of Jesus as might be suggested by the unfortunate archaic translation "the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit is not Jesus' ghost who somehow still is roaming the Earth after Jesus has departed to heaven. Rather the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. As such, the Holy Spirit is a person – a self-conscious, rational individual. The Holy Spirit is not an "it"; we should never refer to the Holy Spirit as "it" because he is not an impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is a "who" not a "which."

Look, for example, at Acts 13:2, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Here the Holy Spirit speaks and uses first person pronouns in reference to himself. "Me" and "I" which only a person can do. Look also in the Gospel of John – John 14:15-17. Here Jesus says,

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

Here Jesus promises the advent of the Counselor – the Holy Spirit – who will come in his place and will indwell believers. As I explained when we looked at the doctrine of the Trinity, John actually violates Greek grammar in this verse in using a masculine pronoun for the Holy Spirit. The word "spirit" in the Greek is neuter, and yet John uses a masculine pronoun "he" with respect to the Holy Spirit.

Reading further in John 14:25-26,

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<sup>1</sup> 5:24

These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, 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 have said to you.

Here we have the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit which obviously again shows that he is a person since he is going to be teaching Jesus' followers the teaching that Jesus has given them.

Then in John 16:7-15 Jesus expands on this. He says,

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Here, Jesus again describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the church after Jesus is ascended to the Father.<sup>2</sup> He makes this very remarkable statement that it is actually to our advantage that Jesus depart and the Holy Spirit come in his place. What could be more profitable (you would think) than having the personal presence of Jesus himself with us? But Jesus says, no, it is actually better for you – it is to your advantage – that the Holy Spirit will come, and he will declare to you the truth about me and will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. It shows the importance and personal nature of the Holy Spirit.

Also, take a look at Romans 8:26-27. Here we have described the intercessory prayer ministry of the Holy Spirit on behalf of believers. Paul says,

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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Here the Holy Spirit is clearly a person because he intercedes for the saints according to God's will. It refers to the mind of the Spirit – God the Father knows what is in the mind of the Spirit and the Spirit intercedes for us according to God's will.

Once again I think it is very clear that we are not dealing here with some kind of impersonal force or energy or power. This is a person. It is God himself. It is the third person of the Trinity.

Finally, this person is distinct from the Father and the Son. This is not the Father or the Son in a different guise or different role. This is a different person. Matthew 28:19 lists all three of the persons together – one of the great trinitarian verses in the New Testament. This is part of the Great Commission. Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” All three of the persons are named in this baptismal formula – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 13:14 we have all three of the persons mentioned in the same verse. The last benediction of this letter says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Here as is typical God refers to God the Father, the Lord refers to Jesus Christ, and then the Holy Spirit is mentioned. These are three distinct persons of the Trinity equally divine and equally personal.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* In terms of the Holy Spirit being God, actually one of my favorite verses to go to is Hebrews 10:15-17. It says, “And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,” and then it gives a quote from the Old Testament, I think it is Jeremiah, where it says, “‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,’ then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’” I find it interesting that it says the Holy Spirit says this, and then it gives a quote from the Old Testament that is specifically talking about Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> In fact where it says “Lord” in the Old Testament it uses the tetragrammaton right there. It seems pretty clear to me what it is specifically saying – it is identifying the Holy Spirit as Yahweh which is also why I like to use this verse when talking to Jehovah's Witnesses as well. I find it very effective.

*Dr. Craig:* Yeah, good! OK, thank you.

*Student:* Like you said, our predecessors classified or named it like the Holy Ghost, and I think this probably is because of John 16:7 which says *he has been with us but then if I go he can come in us*. So there is more to the Trinity than we know right now.

*Dr. Craig:* John 16:7 says, “If I go I will send him to you.” As we read he says he is with you but he will be in you. I take it that the difference there is not in the Holy Spirit himself but rather in the fact that in the old covenant people were not indwelt with the Holy Spirit on a sort of ongoing basis. We will talk about this more later on – the role of the Holy Spirit in the old covenant. It would seem the Holy Spirit would come upon people, like the judges, like Samson or Gideon, to do some great act, some great feat. But then he would leave them. So David can pray in the psalms, *Lord take not thy Holy Spirit from me*. I don’t think any Christian could pray that prayer in the new covenant because the Holy Spirit now indwells us. That’s the change that happened at Pentecost. So the Holy Spirit himself doesn’t change but I think his relationship to the believer undergoes a fundamental change at Pentecost in that he now becomes the permanent indwelling presence within the life of the believer that wasn’t true before.

*Student:* I agree with all that. What I am pointing out is that it says he can’t come in us until Christ leaves.

*Dr. Craig:* OK.

*Student:* The two words that were used for God is *kyrios* and *theos*. What would be the Holy Spirit for Greek?

*Dr. Craig:* “Spirit” is *pneuma hogion*. The Holy Spirit. *Theos* is God. *Kyrios* is Lord. *Ta pneuma hogion* is the Holy Spirit.

*Student:* Another great trinitarian verse in Hebrews is Hebrews 9:14, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleansing our consciences from acts that lead us to death so that we might serve the living God.” You have a trinitarian formula in that verse as well.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I see. The blood of Christ through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God. So you have the trinitarian formula there, too. Yes, good. (Actually this should be *hagion* because it is neuter not masculine.)

## **END DISCUSSION**

Let’s talk about some of the attributes that the Holy Spirit possesses.

1. Keep your finger right there on Hebrews 9:14 that we just read because I want to highlight the Holy Spirit’s attribute of *eternity*. To read the verse again, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works.” Here the attribute of being eternal is referred to with respect to the Holy Spirit.
2. *Omnipresence* is described in Psalm 139:7-8. The Spirit is all-present. “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou

art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!” Here he cannot escape the presence of the Spirit. No matter where he goes God, the Holy Spirit, is present there.<sup>4</sup>

3. *Omniscience* is attributed to the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. Here he says,

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

This is a remarkable verse where Paul says that the Spirit searches even the depths of God and that the Spirit comprehends, encompasses, takes in, understands the thoughts of God himself. This would indicate that we are dealing here with someone who is omniscient.

4. *Holiness* is an attribute of the Spirit. That is obvious just in the name itself – the Holy Spirit. But we have this referred to specifically, for example, in Romans 1:4. It speaks of how Christ is “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” Here the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of holiness.

5. The Holy Spirit is ascribed the attribute of *love* in Romans 5:5. Paul says, “Hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” So the Holy Spirit is not simply the source of power or guidance or strength; he is also the source of love. It is through the Holy Spirit that God’s love is poured into our hearts.

I think you can see that the attributes of deity are ascribed to the Holy Spirit – attributes like eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, holiness, and love. Thereby underlining the deity of the Holy Spirit.

What we’ll do next time is begin to look at the relationship of the third person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit) to the second person of the Trinity (Christ) and then examine the work of the Holy Spirit. If you’ve not been through this material before I think you are going to be very surprised to see how vitally involved the person of the Holy Spirit is in our Christian lives that we live today.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 20:05

<sup>5</sup> Total Running Time: 23:59 (Copyright © 2016 William Lane Craig)