

## **STUDY 5                      God the Holy Spirit**

Four main points

1.     Deity and Personality
2.     General Work
3.     Saving Work
4.     Spiritual Work

### **1.     Deity and Personality**

Reading:

Gen. 1: 1, 2; John 14:23-27; 15:26; Acts 5:3; Eph. 4:30  
KTT 221–226  
H & W 128-133

### **2.     General Work**

Reading:

Psalm 104: 29, 30; John 6:44; 16:5-18  
H & W 133-135

### **3.     Saving Work**

Reading:

Rom. 3: 20-28; Rom. 8: 1-17; Eph. 4: 22-24  
KTT 215–220  
H & W 136-152

### **4.     Spiritual Work**

Reading:

1 Cor. 12: 1-11; Gal. 5:16-26  
Eph. 1:3  
KTT 253-255

## 1. Deity and Personality

Christian teaching affirms that the Holy Spirit is as much a divine ‘person’ (whatever the limitations of that word may be) as the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son. Throughout Scripture the words and works of the Holy Spirit are equated with the words and works of God. In the New Testament the words of the LORD are often said to be those of the Spirit. The works of God are often accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit. From the outset of creation the work of the Spirit is seen (Gen. 1:2).

The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. We may conveniently describe the Holy Spirit as the ‘third person of the Trinity’ but not implying subordination. The baptismal formula given by Jesus to the apostles embraces each person of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Many symbols are used to represent the work of the Holy Spirit, such as wind, water, fire, oil and the dove. The danger is to limit the Holy Spirit to an impersonal force, albeit a force for God and for good. Some of the symbols used for the Holy Spirit in Scripture carry a neuter gender and pronoun ‘it’. There is also a modern trend to call God ‘she’ at every possible opportunity and the Holy Spirit is of course far more vulnerable to this treatment than the Father or the Son. This idea, however well-intentioned, can easily lead to serious error and should therefore be avoided. It is generally safer to use masculine pronouns for God in the fullness of his Trinitarian being to avoid confusion and to maintain a clear understanding of the important Biblical imagery. That need not mean that we exclude from our understanding of God characteristics that we in our culture associate more readily with the female gender.

There used to be a time when the Holy Spirit was considered to be the neglected person of the Trinity. Now it is perhaps the case that the balance has swung too far the other way. It is important not to lose sight of the unity of the ‘One God’ as we try to appreciate the fullness of the being of the Triune Godhead, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit makes the active presence of God known in the world. ‘In the Old Testament, the presence of God was many times manifested in the glory of God and in theophanies, and in the Gospels Jesus himself manifested the presence of God among men. But after Jesus ascended into heaven ... the Holy Spirit is now the *primary* manifestation of the presence of the Trinity among us. He is the one how is most prominently *present* with us now’ (Grudem).

## 2. General Work

The general work of the Holy Spirit in bringing creation into being is recorded in Genesis. The Holy Spirit gives life. Scripture also records that the Spirit has a role in sustaining the living world (Psalm 104: 29, 30).

The Holy Spirit reveals truth from God. The Holy Spirit is said to have inspired the Holy Scriptures. This is an interesting point because both the Father and the Son speak through the Scriptures. It is a matter of the Holy Spirit being the agent or instrument through which God speaks. The work of the Holy Spirit also extends to his interpretation of the Scriptures. As a great composer of music would be the greatest interpreter of it, while sticking to the printed score, so the Holy Spirit is Scripture's great interpreter, illuminating the Word of God to the reader or listener, without departing from that Word (*Come Divine Interpreter, bring us eyes thy book to read*, Wesley).

It is by the presence of the Holy Spirit that the Father and the Son (Jesus) are made known both to the church and to individuals. A vital work of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to the Eternal Son. The Spirit also empowers people for service. This applied to the prophets of the Old Testament but it also applies to New Testament believers and the church today (Acts 1:8)

A great tension exists in our understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freewill. Though this is often considered in the context of responding to the saving work of God in Christ, it does of course apply to every part of human life. There is no such thing as absolute freedom for each individual is constrained by his or her own nature.

God has exercised his sovereign rule in such a way as to give individuals freedom of choice. That choice, exercised by Adam, resulted in the fall and our consequent bias to sin. There is a sense in which we are unable to choose what is right. Yet God has not abandoned the world and continues through the Holy Spirit to work in it in a general way, restraining evil and promoting good. This is called prevenient grace and has been an important emphasis of the Methodist movement.

The Holy Spirit is involved at every stage of Christian experience. It is the Holy Spirit who gives a Godlike atmosphere when he makes his presence known. It is by the Holy Spirit that the believer has saving faith and assurance of forgiveness. The Holy Spirit purifies, sanctifies and unifies God's people.

### 3. Saving Work

Salvation is, from beginning to end, the work of God. Just as the Holy Spirit had a vital role in creation so the Spirit has a vital role in salvation. Firstly, the Spirit mediates God's prevenient grace. The Spirit also convicts of sin, illuminates truth, reveals Christ, lives in believers, inspires prayer and prepares the believer for heaven.

The two major steps in salvation may be called 'justification' and 'sanctification', though it is possible to add a third step, 'glorification'. The Holy Spirit is involved in each of these steps. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts human beings of sin, and shows the righteousness of Jesus. The believer receives the Spirit at conversion. It is the Spirit who makes the person, who has been 'dead to God', come alive to God. It is the Spirit who bears witness to the believer inwardly and gives an assurance of salvation.

Justification is clearly related to justice. It is judicial language. It is only one way of understanding salvation but it is a very important way. Sanctification is a further step. The Christian should be separate from sin and open to God, living in obedience to the will of God. The Christian is called on to full salvation that is not only being accounted as righteous (imputed righteousness) but also becoming more and more Christ-like (imparted righteousness). At salvation the righteousness of Christ is imputed (counted as ours) but it has been a particular Methodist emphasis that the righteousness of Christ can be imparted (becoming ours). This is the doctrine of scriptural holiness, entire sanctification or what is sometimes called perfect love.

The teaching of 'entire sanctification' or 'perfect love' is now much neglected, even within Methodism, and consequently is often misunderstood. Wesley taught that, though there was no absolute perfection on earth, it was at least possible that Christians could be saved now from all sin and wrong-doing and that they are 'perfect' in the sense that they do not deliberately or knowingly commit sin and are freed from evil thoughts and emotions. A further misunderstanding is that the way to come to this state is by discipline and trying hard. While discipline and trying hard inevitably have their place, as a believer is justified by faith it is important to understand that a believer is sanctified by faith.

In our Christian lives it is important that we depend on the Holy Spirit's power. Christians are to walk according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-6, 12-16).

#### 4. Spiritual Work

Charismatic and Pentecostal thinking has emphasised the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian worship, mission and experience. To stress only this work or to exclude it will lead to an unbalanced understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The expression 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13) is undoubtedly Scriptural but what does it mean? It is often associated with, though clearly different from, water-baptism. This problem is compounded by the fact that some people have labelled a particular experience 'baptism in the Spirit'. To discuss the label is not to belittle the experience. From the Scriptural context it seems as if the 'baptism in the Spirit' most accurately describes the reception of the Holy Spirit at conversion. However, that is not to say that there is not an experience of the 'filling of the Holy Spirit' and other spiritual experiences. 'The sealing of the Holy Spirit' implies ownership. This is not an expression that is much in fashion. Instead most discussion centres on the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The fruit (singular) of the Spirit has many characteristics. These are in themselves Christ-like qualities. There is no option to choose one characteristic and neglect the others. In contrast, the gifts (plural) are given by God, as and when he sees fit and to whom he sees fit. Much discussion has centred on the issue as to whether all the gifts that were given in New Testament times are still given today. Others have wondered whether the list given was ever intended to be exhaustive. It is clear that some people have natural gifts that can be used in the service of God. God may enhance a natural gift or he may give a new one. Gifts should exalt Christ, involve all, unite all, lay foundations, build up, and promote mission. The Holy Spirit equips God's servants to serve. A considerable amount of discretion should rightly be observed in all these matters. The two most controversial gifts of the Holy Spirit are speaking in tongues and prophecy. These gifts are not only listed in Scripture but the context for their use is also described. The gift of speaking in tongues is given for the worship of God. The gift of prophecy is given for the application of the Word of God to the people. [In my experience, people have often used speaking in tongues and a following interpretation for communicating a loving message of God for his people. While this has not been unhelpful, I have wondered why the gift was not used in accordance with its God-given purpose. People have used prophecy to bring a new message from God often relating to a particular situation. My own views on the canon of Scripture encourage me to look for an application of Scripture to a particular situation – I believe there are prophetic gifts but not prophets today.]