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The Personhood and Divinity of the Holy Spirit

BY JOHN PECKHAM

The Holy Spirit is central to God's mission. Accordingly, we need a biblical understanding of the identity and nature of the Holy Spirit. This Bible study addresses the following key questions: Is the Holy Spirit a person or a mere force or power of God? Is the Holy Spirit distinct from the Father and Son (Christ)? Is the Holy Spirit truly divine?

To answer the first question, we must recognize that the word "person" in this context does not mean a *human* person or one limited to a physical body, as humans are. Instead, we simply mean one who has *personal* characteristics that *only* persons have, such as self-consciousness, reason, and will.

1. List the personal characteristics attributed to the Holy Spirit in the following texts:

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

"No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11).

"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing [spiritual gifts] to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

The Holy Spirit:
can be _____.
_____ the things of God.
distributes gifts to individuals as He _____.

These and other biblical texts describe the Holy Spirit with personal characteristics. A mere force or power cannot be grieved (requiring self-consciousness), cannot know the things of God (requiring reason), and cannot will to give spiritual gifts to persons (requiring will).

2. What other personal characteristics of the Holy Spirit are found in the following texts?

“For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:12).

“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” (Rom. 8:26).

Only persons can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), know (1 Cor. 2:11), will (1 Cor. 12:11), teach (Luke 12:12), intercede (Rom. 8:26), testify or bear witness (John 15:26), be lied to and tested (Acts 5:3, 4, 9), speak (Acts 8:29), admonish (Neh. 9:30), lead and guide (Ps. 143:10; Acts 8:29), call to ministry and send out (Acts 13:2-4), forbid or allow (Acts 16:6, 7), and so on.

Here and elsewhere, Scripture identifies the Holy Spirit as a person, referring to the Holy Spirit as having characteristics that only persons have.¹

3. How do the following texts distinguish the Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father as *distinct persons*?

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My [Jesus’] name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit (the Helper) is sent by the _____ in the name of _____.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I [Jesus] shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26).

The Holy Spirit (the Helper) is sent by _____ from the _____.

As sent by the Father in the name of Jesus (John 14:26) and sent by Jesus from the Father (John 15:26), the Holy Spirit cannot be either the Father or the Son, but is distinct from the Father and the Son.

Scripture demonstrates, then, that the Holy Spirit is not the same person as the Son (Christ) or the Father (or a part of one or both). The Holy Spirit is a *distinct* person (see also Matt. 12:32; Luke 3:21, 22; John 14:16).

Further, we will see that Scripture identifies the Holy Spirit as a *divine* person with the Father and the Son, in whose name believers are baptized (Matt. 28:19).

4. In Isaiah 6:8-10 God declares a specific message to Isaiah. In Acts 28 Paul quotes this very message. But who does he say spoke this message? Read the text below and fill in the blanks.

“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers” (Acts 28:25).

Here and elsewhere, Scripture identifies the Holy Spirit as a person, referring to the Holy Spirit as having characteristics that only persons have.

According to the Bible, the words God spoken in Isaiah 6:8-10 were spoken by the _____. Likewise, Hebrews 3:7 quotes words spoken by God in Psalm 95:7-11 by saying “as the Holy Spirit says.” These and other texts refer to the Holy Spirit as God.

5. To whom did Ananias lie when he decided to keep back some of the proceeds of the sale of his land while pretending he had given all the proceeds? Read the text below and fill in the blanks.

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God!’” (Acts 5:3, 4).

When Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, he did not lie to _____, but to _____.

Lying to the Holy Spirit, then, was lying to God. Thus, Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as God (see, also, Matt. 28:19). Only God is eternal, all-knowing (omniscient), and present everywhere (omnipresent), yet the Holy Spirit is referred to as eternal (Heb 9:14), all-knowing (1 Cor. 2:10, 11), and present everywhere (John 14:16) and thus must be divine.

According to Scripture, then, the Holy Spirit is a person (possessing *personal* characteristics), the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is divine—one of the three coeternal persons of the Godhead (Trinity).² ☉

¹ Ellen G. White comments: “The Holy Spirit is a person. . . . The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God” (*Evangelism* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946], pp. 616, 617). Elsewhere she adds, “The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ’s name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality” (manuscript 93, 1893, in *Manuscript Releases* [Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993], vol. 20, p. 324).

² For much more on the Holy Spirit, see John C. Peckham, *God With Us: An Introduction to Adventist Theology* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2023), chap. 5.

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