

**WHO IS THE SPIRIT?**  
**The Holy Spirit**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

Sometimes I have the tendency to get into the exotic and the new and neglect the basic and the fundamental. I want to spend some time this evening ministering concerning the Holy Spirit. The person of the Holy Spirit.

I grew up in a church atmosphere that placed a great deal of emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. I treasure that emphasis. At the same time there were a lot of things that happened that I did not understand. While people all around me were experiencing the Holy Spirit I must confess that at times I had a very warped understanding of who the Holy Spirit was.

The words “Holy Ghost” were used quite extensively in my background of vocabulary. “Holy” was a word that had its own peculiar definition in my background. It meant someone that had made themselves look as homely as possible. That was what holy meant. Therefore when you spoke of the *Holy* Spirit immediately to my childlike and adolescent mind positive imagery did not come. Holy was something and someone that could not possibly be joyful, happy, full of fun and delight. It was someone who had a long face that fell. Sort of an inspector of the truth in terms of what they looked like, what they said, how they acted. They were filled with negatives than positives. So part of my coming to grips with the person of the Holy Spirit was beginning to learn what the term “holy” meant.

I think, without getting into some kind of theological argument on what the meaning of holy is, I would say that a good word for “holy” in terms of putting it into our language and understanding is the word “healthy.” I don’t know of any more healthy person than the Holy Spirit. I don’t know how you could live a more healthy life in your inner being than to have that inner life be possessed and indwelt by God’s Spirit.

We also use the term “Ghost” a great deal. Of course that’s the King James language. It was appropriate language for the 17<sup>th</sup> century but it caused me a great many problems. Ghosts were something that hung around graveyards. They frightened you at night. And I quite frankly was frightened by the Holy Spirit. I sensed that Jesus loved me. I wasn’t so sure quite frankly about God the Father. The way sometimes the teaching was presented it was Jesus’ love saves you from the Father’s wrath. The Father is looking for an excuse to get you while Jesus is looking for an excuse to save you. That’s been part of the struggle in my life to understand that God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are in cooperation in my salvation and your salvation. Not totally in different directions either.

Ghosts hung around cemeteries and dead bodies. So what would a young person want to do with the Holy Ghost. Realize though when you use the term Holy Ghost it no longer means “spirit” as it did in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Holy Spirit is not a spook. The Holy Spirit does not inhabit dead people except by the spirit of his holiness Jesus Christ is raised from the dead and we also participate in that resurrection from the Spirit of God. But he inhabits living people and he’s come to reproduce the character of Jesus Christ in us.

I wish to talk some about the Holy Spirit as a person. I think whenever we start looking at this we’re into immediately a discussion of the nature of God. And an understanding of who God is. This is so difficult to fathom the mystery and the nature and being of God. We know much

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about God. All that we know about God is given to us in the scripture. The scripture reveals to us that God is one. Yet the scriptures also reveal to us that God is Father, Son and Spirit. That's mystery. We can't possibly understand in our finite minds how God could be one and yet Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How he can be three persons yet one God. How do we contemplate this?

I used the illustration a number of months ago that sometimes in regard to divine things trying to describe God's nature and God's being in our language is equivalent to trying to tell an Eskimo what pineapple tastes like. About the closest you can come is "sweet, chewy blubber." It just doesn't quite describe what is involved in the nature of a pineapple. How sweet and wonderful and tart it is.

The scriptures say that in regard to the nature of God, Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things which he has revealed belong to us and to our children." God has not chosen in his revelation to give us a full understanding of the mystery of his being. He has chosen to give us enough that is essential for our salvation and given us enough as well to reckon with the fact that he is far vaster and greater in his intelligence and being and existence than we. As great as the distance between a centipede and us is in a certain sense is the mind of God from our own mind.

A helpful understanding for me of the understanding of the relationship of God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit goes something like this. If we think of God as one and we recognize that the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Spirit and the Son is not the Spirit but the Son is God, the Father is God, the Spirit is God. There's distinction, yet there is one God. It is from God the Father that we gain our sense of belonging. It is from Christ the Son that we gain our sense of worth. How can we measure how valuable we are except by the cross of Jesus Christ? And it is from the Spirit of God we gain our sense of competence. Our sense that we can actually be all that God wants us to be in terms of our belongingness. All our potential is in terms of our worth. So we look at the Spirit this evening and his person.

I want to make a point of the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is a person or is personal. This distinguishes the Holy Spirit from something that is impersonal. Something that is impersonal is for example a force, like electricity. The Holy Spirit is not impersonal force. He's not some law operating like the law of gravity. He is person.

Why is this an important distinction when we look at the Holy Spirit? It's important because we must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is a power that we often in our lack of knowledge or weakness want to somehow get a hold of and use. That would be impersonal force. We want to get a hold of it and use it. Whereas the Spirit as a person is a person who wants to get a hold of us and use us. There's all the difference in the world in that definition. Whether we're going to get a hold of God's power through his Spirit and use him or he's really going to get a hold of our life and use us effectively for his glory.

How do we know that the Spirit is personal? We know from the scripture. Let me share with you some elements of scriptural teaching that say to us that the Spirit of God of person. John 16 Jesus continually refers to the Spirit as person by using the masculine pronoun "he". One of the offenses I think we commit against the Holy Spirit from time to time is calling him an "it." As though "it" were some neuter kind of force out there. The Holy Spirit is not neuter. The Holy

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Spirit is not impersonal. The Holy Spirit is personal and Jesus described him in terms of the masculine personal pronoun *he*.

Another aspect that teaches us that he is person is the fact that Jesus calls him the comforter. That word is maybe a word we need to work with for a moment.

The word in the Greek is *paraclete*, which is a combination of two words – one who is called alongside. One called alongside in what sense? To watch our struggle through life? That's not a real comforter. A comforter is one who is called alongside to help. To make a difference.

If I'm out on the freeway and I have a flat tire and someone comes along and says to me "We're sorry to see you there. God bless you," and moves on. They have not been a *paraclete* to me. A *paraclete* is someone who comes along with the power to help me at the time that I need that assistance. That's why the word Comforter has been so beautifully applied to the Holy Spirit. And why the term Counselor is also appropriate for the Spirit.

Jesus said in fact of the Holy Spirit, "I will send you another comforter." The word in the Greek, there are two words for the word "another." One is "another of a different kind." On the other hand "another of the same kind." Not different at all. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit "I will send you another comforter – of the same kind. One just like me is coming. He will not be like me confined to humanity." This is the uniqueness of Jesus. He is God become flesh. The Holy Spirit has not become flesh except through us. This is why it's so difficult to think of the Spirit as person. We think of persons as having physical attributes. Eyes and ears, etc. The Holy Spirit is person. But he is person living through us. He's another comforter.

Another reason why in the scripture we know that the Holy Spirit is personal is that personal characteristics are given to him the scripture. Three essential elements of personality are intelligence, feeling and will or determination. In the scripture the Holy Spirit is described as having each of these facets in his identity or being.

1 Corinthians 2:11 tells us that no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God, which tells us that the Holy Spirit has intellect, mind. He knows and searches the deep things of God. As well the Spirit not only knows the deep things of God but he knows the deep things in our heart according to Romans 8. He is able to intercede for us to God on our behalf because he not only has access to the depths in God but he has access to the depths in us.

Electricity, something impersonal, does not have knowledge. The Spirit has knowledge or intellect.

The Spirit has feelings. Ephesians 4:30 tells us that the Spirit of God can be grieved. That is such a significant statement of the Holy Spirit. As I model it against some of my responses of times when I am offended I tend to have more of an identity of being angry than being grieved when something happens that disappoints me. "Why didn't that person do better? That ticks me off!" But the Spirit is not described as an angry spirit. The Spirit is described as one whom Christians may grieve. I think that the kind of feelings that the Spirit has when we have failed in really realizing God's potential for us is the sort of feelings that Hosea felt in the Old Testament book when his wife Gomer was unfaithful to him. That grieving is not some slight sort of

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concern, some passing kind of concern. But the Spirit is deeply marked in person and wounded when we have in some way transgressed against God and come short of his purpose for our wife.

This word “grieve” suggests to us that the Spirit is capable of feeling. You know from the Spirit of God living in you how capable he is of strong feeling. I know when the Spirit of God is very uncomfortable with what I’m doing. I know when the Spirit of God is tugging at my heart and saying, Don’t you dare! We know this in our inner nature because the Spirit of God is person and feels.

Not only that but the Spirit of God has personality in the sense that he wills or he determines. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:11 “But the Spirit gives gifts to each as he determines.” This then attributes the power of decision making to the Holy Spirit. It is not we in the body of Christ to determine what our calling is. In the ultimate sense it is the Lord who determines what those callings are and our task is to walk in faithfulness to that calling. I do not know all the reasons why God put me in the body in the position that I am in the body. I’ve sometimes wondered why I haven’t ended up doing something other than I am doing. The only thing that I know that can give a sufficient answer is that the Spirit of God directed me. The Spirit of God led me. The Spirit of God willed it for me.

One of the strange things I think the Spirit of God used in willing that I have the particular responsibility in the body of Christ that I have. When I was 8 years old I couldn’t see the board very well I school and I had to keep moving up to the front row. It turned out I needed glasses. No 8-year-old boy likes to wear glasses. To get saddled with glasses at that age is no fun thing. Especially when you’re very conscious of the fact that glasses cost money. In your first year or so of having glasses you break several pair. You are warned, “I want you to be careful.” That then begins to effect the kind of athletics that you participate in. And when you’re playing basketball you don’t go in for the rebound. That is just the time you get smacked up the side of the head and break your glasses. When you’re playing baseball you’re very careful if the ball comes anywhere near your face you run the opposite direction.

Glasses have had a profound impact on my personality. They drove me more inward. They drove me indoors. They drove me to books, to more contemplation. The Holy Spirit used that as a tool in my life. I didn’t will that. I think he willed that. Now today that contacts are available I haven’t been able to bring myself to wear contacts because glasses are such a part of my personality.

The Spirit of course gives to some gifts of healing, gift of faith, gifts of discernment, gifts of prophecy and tongues and interpretation of tongues. Gifts of miracles and the like.

One of the things that can do very much violence in the body is if we begin saying, “Holy Spirit of God you have to will in my life what you will in that person’s life.” The Holy Spirit is not in the business of making us carbon copies of one another. He is in the business of making us like Jesus Christ, which means that our full potentiality as an individual can be discovered and we will be like no one else other than Jesus. He wills.

Another aspect of the Holy Spirit as person is the fact that personal acts in scripture are done by him. He not only possesses the attributes of personality, intellect, will and emotion. But personal acts are done by him. For example the Holy Spirit of God is said to speak, Acts 13:2.

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This speaking was probably done through a word of prophecy. But the church of Antioch there were elders who were seeking the Lord and fasting and the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabus and Saul to the work that I have called them." The Holy Spirit at that moment gave an impression through speech to one of the persons in that body saying, now is the time to put my plan into operation.

The Holy Spirit of God is a communicating Spirit. He's one that wants to bring us into tune with the Father's will and the Son's redemptive act. The Spirit does the personal act of testifying. Jesus says that "When the Spirit comes he will testify of me," bear witness of me. John 15:26.

Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit will teach you." John 14:26. "He will teach you and guide you into all truth." And by the way the truth is spiritual truth and moral truth, not scientific truth. The Spirit has not that much interest in helping us understand the equations of physicals although he is delighted our mind can expand. He gave us that potential. But the truth of which Jesus is talking is the truth that leads us to God.

The Spirit of God in the personal activity convicts. Jesus says, "When the Spirit comes he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come." I think therefore of the Holy Spirit in this way. That the Holy Spirit is God's prosecuting attorney in the world when it comes to salvation. The Holy Spirit since the death of Jesus Christ has been with every human heart that has heard the message of Jesus. Has been bringing the evidence to their heart, that the verdict that was passed on Jesus by the leadership that pawned him off as a false messiah that that verdict was a wrong verdict. That Jesus is who he says he is and that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead. The Spirit is at work bringing us to that perception. That's why the body of Christ is still around after 2000 years. And other false messiahs have come and gone. The Spirit is in the world bringing us to that conviction of the identity of Jesus Christ. We could not come to know Jesus Christ except through the work of that Spirit in us.

I think the way of our doing business in law describes perhaps what the Holy Spirit is doing in terms of our own personal redemption. In this life he is seeking to settle out of court. Rather than face the judgment. Where we have the prosecution against us and the evidence there. But rather he is saying to us, Come now the Lord who loves you. But the personal activity of the spirit is he convicts.

Another personal activity of the Spirit is that he prays. Romans 8:26 "He intercedes for us according to the will of God."

He directs. Acts 16:6-7. The beautiful way in which he directed Paul was he directed him through some no's in his life. Paul wanted to go to Asia to minister and the Holy Spirit said twice, no you won't go. The Spirit does bring personal direction to our life. I know if you've walked with the Lord anytime at all you have sensed moments when the Holy Spirit checked you and said no you cannot do that or yes you can do that.

The Spirit also reveals to us the mind of God and the will of God. 1 Peter 1:21.

The Spirit is also personal in that he responds to personal treatment. He can be lied to. Acts 5:3, Ananias and Saphira directly lied to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is concerned for truth. Some people wonder why it was in the early church there was this incredible passing of

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judgment upon Ananias and Saphira when that's not a normal method of church discipline. If it were every time we picked up a hymnal there would be people falling out of the pews. But why did the Holy Spirit use this? It's because the early church was giving testimony to the veracity and truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is the first lie in that community. The Holy Spirit simply moved in judgment, which is waiting in the future age into the present age and said my community must be a credible community. The spirit can be lied to.

You can't lie to an impersonal force. I cannot lie to this pulpit. It could care less what I say.

The Holy Spirit can be resisted. Stephen says in Acts 7:51 that always Israel did resist the Spirit of God. Hebrews 10:29 says we can insult the Spirit of grace. Jesus says that we can actually commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Which is to so profane the Holy Spirit that no longer are we capable of repenting of sin.

Some people by the way get caught up in what the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is. It is simply the steadfast refusal to listen to the witness that the Holy Spirit makes of Jesus. So that ultimately everyone in the eternal age that has turned away from Jesus Christ will have committed that sin because they have refused to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit bearing witness to Jesus. By refusing to listen to that voice they have committed a sin beyond which there is no salvation.

These points to say that when the Spirit comes into our life even though we cannot see him as we see a physical person nevertheless he very much is person. We relate to him as person. I must be conscious and aware as a Christian that it is not I myself that live alone but the Spirit of God who dwells in me. That someone outside of me is living in me. Tabernacling, tenting in me. Therefore I want to be very aware of being a host if you will of the Holy Spirit. I want as well for the Holy Spirit in those moments when I can't clean up my act to have the freedom to get in there with his mop and sweeper and take some of the things in my life that I don't seem to have the authority and power to deal with.

The Holy Spirit additionally beyond being person is a divine person. He is fully God. Scriptures describe him as bearing the attributes of gold he is eternal, Hebrews 9:14. He is all knowing, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 tell us that he has access to the deep things of God. He is everywhere present, Psalm 139:7,10 tell us there is no where we can flee from his Spirit.

The Holy Spirit as God does the works of God. He is active in creation. Genesis 1:2. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters." If he is active in creation, he is active in recreation as well. Ezekiel says of the spirit, the Spirit of God brought the bones back to life and he put his Spirit within them and they lived. Jesus in picking up on this passage where Ezekiel in chapter 36 had prophesied of the day when God would wash his people with water and put his Spirit within them that they might live. Jesus says that we who are born again must be born of water and of the Spirit. We must be cleansed by God and we must have the Spirit of God indwelling in us. The Spirit creates, he gives life in the beginning. He's the agency of creation. As well he is active in the creation of the new life in Christ which we have. He is the conveyor, the bringer of that new life through the blood of Jesus Christ to us. No one could be born except through him.

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I must remember this when I think about the Holy Spirit's work in my life and his overall purpose. The Holy Spirit is a very creative person within me. He's very creative within you. He wants to put in your heart the dreams of God and the mind of God. He not only wants you to discover who you are. He wants you to discover what God wants you to be. He is at work fashioning his will and his purpose in your heart, crating out of that which is nothing. Also he sometimes creates out of a mess as Ezekiel 36, the valley of dry bones. The Spirit as God is the author of the scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16 says all scripture is inspired of God. The word literally is "expired by God." It's a product of God's breath. It's a product of God's activity. 2 Peter 1:21 tells us as well that the writers of old wrote as they were born along by the Spirit of God. So when we ourselves have a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit we are having an encounter with the eternal Spirit of God. The ancient but ever present Spirit. In that moment when I'm encountering the Holy Spirit of God in my life have the same person who dwells in Jesus. He was anointed with the Spirit. He was conceived of the Spirit. He was empowered of the Spirit. The same Spirit that empowered Jesus is in me. The same Spirit that ministered in the apostle Paul's life when the apostle's died and the course was done, the Spirit wasn't taken back into heaven. The Spirit's presence continued on earth. The same Spirit that was in Paul is in me and in you. The same Spirit that was in Luther and Calvin, the same Spirit that has been in every Christian, great and small who has ever lived, dwells in us. The same eternal Spirit of God.

In fact, that Spirit of God wants to reproduce in your life in a spiritual measure what the Spirit did in Jesus' life in the physical nature. Jesus, it is said, was conceived by the Spirit of God. That's exactly what happens when we come to new birth. The Spirit of God is at work still to bring Jesus into the world, into our heart. He's at work in the birthing process of Jesus to bring Jesus into reality into our heart. That same Spirit who conceived Jesus. The same Spirit later came upon Jesus and empowered him and anointed him for his ministry. That Spirit also wants to empower us to live for Christ. The Spirit also is involved in resurrection. All the works of God. Romans 8:11 describes an event that is yet to come in our experience with the Spirit. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you [notice the Spirit is active in resurrection of Jesus from the dead] he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body through his Spirit who lives in you."

Somehow in a way that we do not fathom or fully understand in any stretch of the imagination is that the Spirit is that executive administrator of God which in the day of resurrection assembles all the molecules of our personal physical existence and brings them together in one new body modeled after that of Christ.

All of these suggest that when we think of the Spirit he is personal and he is fully God. When we receive him it is as though God has designed us to be receptors of his nature. Receptors of his person.

One final thing about the Spirit this evening. Then next Sunday I want to share some about the filling of the Spirit. At least 4 times in the new testament where it is appropriate to say a person is filled with the Spirit.

I'm fascinated by symbols that are used of the Spirit to describe his work in our life.

The Spirit is seen in various symbols. Again because he does not have bodily nature we must try to get an analogy comparison of him. The Spirit of God is represented on occasion as fire. John

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the Baptist said in John 3:11 “When the Messiah comes he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” I recognize that it’s possible to see fire in terms of judgment. But there is an aspect where historically the church is looked at the Holy Spirit as an agency of fire. “Our God is a consuming fire.” Which suggests to us that the Holy Spirit works to burn out that in our life which is not of God. Burn out dregs.

The Spirit is described in terms of wind. The actual word in the Greek means air. We have pneumatic tires – the same word. The Spirit as wind or air means that the Spirit of God is everywhere present. Just as everywhere there is air which we breath so everywhere the Spirit of God is.

The Spirit of God is described in terms of the symbol of water. John 3:37-39 Jesus talks about the water that if you drink you will never thirst again. He also teaches us in John that there would be a well in us of living water. This he spoke of the Spirit.

Why is it significant that the Spirit is talked of in terms of water? Water is essential to life. You cannot live without it. Water washes. I’d hate to think of going through life without washing. Water is refreshing. Every time I set down for a meal I like a glass of cold water. I like to drink water; it refreshes. The Spirit of God is described as water because he is all these things to us. He is essential to life. He washes us. He refreshes us.

The Spirit of God is also called a seal. He is described as the seal of our inheritance. A seal is something, which marks ownership. And it marks genuineness and authority.

The story is told in a logging town in the older days when they used to have lumber coming in from being cut down in the forest and coming to the logging town. In the forest they would stamp the owner’s seal on the log so that when they came into town there would be a corresponding seal present in the town that could be matched up to the seal that was cut into the log.

In that sense when we come into God’s eternal court it is the Spirit of God who is the matching corresponding seal in our life that we have received the gift of grace in our hearts and that we are thereby marked as genuine children – sons and daughters of God.

The Spirit of God is seen in terms of oil. An anointing. Continually in the Old Testament oil is poured upon prophets, priests, and kings as they assumed office signifying that they had now changed roles and the Spirit of God represented as oil mean that he was going to go forth on his people with healing and with sustenance.

The Spirit of God is also described as a dove. A dove settled upon Jesus. Describing the gentleness, the tenderness, the innocence, the peace and the purity of God.

One other designation in scripture that helps us in knowing the gentleness of the personality of the Holy Spirit and the healthiness of his Spirit is given to us by Paul in Galatians 5. Here is a description of the personality of the Spirit of God that as we allow him to live in our life these kind of personality patterns are produced. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”

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All of this a kind of introductory look at the Holy Spirit. Nothing really sensational. Nothing perhaps that you did not know. But I think probably on the day to day level of life the Holy Spirit in our lives is really involved in a lot of non sensational areas. It is that daily walk with God in which we come to know in a better way the personality of his Spirit.

One other thing that can be said is I can describe the Holy Spirit till I'd put you to sleep with definitions. But describing a person and meeting a person is entirely different. What I've tried to do this evening is whet your appetite if you haven't had one to want to meet this gracious friend, the Holy Spirit. The healthy Spirit of God. He wants to reproduce a personality in your life that is marvelous. He wants to give himself to you. I never have to worry when I'm introducing the Spirit that he is going to be anything less than I have made him out to be. If anything he is going to be far more than I have ever said that he is.

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