

The Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit – A Person

The New Testament evidence is clear and strong that we should view the Holy Spirit as a person not as a power or a force. Important texts which clarify this are; Matthew 28 verse 19, 2 Corinthians 13 verse 14 and 1 Peter 1 verse 2. Since the Father and the Son are persons the Holy Spirit is a person also.

There are other personal activities ascribed to the Holy Spirit:

Teaching: John 14 verse 26

Bearing witness that we are God's children- John 15 verse 26, Romans 8 verse 16

Praying on behalf of others: Romans 8 verses 26-27

The Holy Spirit is also described as being grieved by sin in the lives of Christians. Ephesians 4 verse 30

What is the Work of the Holy Spirit?

To show the active presence of God in the world and especially in the Church

He is present to do God's work in the world. From the very beginning of creation, we have an indication that the Holy Spirit is to complete and sustain what God the Father has planned and what God the Son has begun.

Genesis 1 verse 2, the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. At Pentecost with the beginning of a new creation in Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who came to give power to the Church. See Acts 1 verse 8. It is appropriate that Paul should call the Holy Spirit the 'first fruits' or down payment of the full revealing of God's presence that we will know in the new heavens and the new earth (Romans 8 v 23, 2 Corinthians 1 v 22)

The Holy Spirit Empowers

He gives life – In creation, He also brings about the new creation see John 3 verse 5. This is sometimes called regeneration. The Holy Spirit enables those who are spiritually dead because of disobedience and sin to repent and believe the gospel. See the first half of Ephesians 2 and also Ephesians 4 verses 23-24.

Consistent with this lifegiving function is the fact that it was the Holy Spirit who conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary his mother.

He Gives Power for Service

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit frequently empowers people for special service e.g. Joshua, many of the characters in the book of Judges, also Bezalel in Exodus 31. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is seen supremely in the life of Jesus- at his Baptism (Matthew 3 v16) and then leading him out to the desert to be tested by Satan (Matthew 4). At the very beginning of his public ministry he quotes from the prophet Isaiah 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me' (Luke 4 v 18). The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples see Acts 1 verse 8. As they preached the gospel they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were able to proclaim the word with great power.

The Holy Spirit Purifies

He cleanses from sin. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit does an initial cleansing to enable the believer to make a decisive break with patterns of sin – see 1 Corinthians 6 verse 11 and following. The symbol of fire was used by John the Baptist to describe the work of the Spirit in Luke 3. Remember the tongues of fire in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit produces growth in holiness of life. The classic passage concerning this is Galatians 5 verses 22-26 often referred to as the Fruit of the Spirit. These are qualities which reflect the character of God.

There have been in recent years (indeed periodically over the centuries) those who say a purifying work of the Spirit occurs when a person is 'slain in the spirit' (terminology varies). This invariably means a person falling to the ground sometimes in a semi-conscious state. This particular phrase is not found in the Bible though some would argue the experience is. Contemporary experiences should be evaluated according to lasting results: does my life change in character which is for the better: Where is the fruit?

The Holy Spirit gives evidence of God's presence

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit frequently made himself known by signs that indicated his activity. He descended like a dove on Jesus at his Baptism, we read of rushing wind and tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus spoke of believers having streams of life-giving water pouring out of their heart.

This is directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit (John 7 verses 37-39). In the lives of individual believers, the Holy Spirit makes himself known, Romans 8 verse 16. He provides a guarantee of our future fellowship with Him in Heaven.

He Guides and Directs God's People

He was with Jesus; the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness (Matthew v 4). He was with Philipp and the Ethiopian (Acts 8 v 29). We read of guidance for Paul on his missionary journeys e.g. Acts 16 verses 6-10. But in the vast majority of cases the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit is not dramatic. Scripture talks about a day to day guidance – being led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8 v 14, Galatians 5 v 16). It is possible to understand Paul here to be referring only to obedience to the moral commands of Scripture, but this interpretation seems quite unlikely, especially since the entire context is dealing with emotions and desires which we perceive in a more subjective way. Note the use of the phrase 'desires of the flesh' and 'desires of the Spirit' in Galatians 5 verses 16-26

The Holy Spirit Unifies

In the event of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit created a new community- the Church. The speaking in tongues which people all over the world could understand symbolised God's intention to bring together in the international community of the Church people from all over the world. The classic case in the book of Acts is 2 verses 44 - 47

The Holy Spirit and our Response

Many examples in both Old and New Testament indicate that the Holy Spirit will withdraw blessing from us depending on our response. In the OT the Holy Spirit came upon Samson but left him when he persisted in sin (Judges 16 v20). In the NT Paul warned the Ephesian Christians (Ephesians 4 v 30) and also the church at Thessalonica, 'Do not restrain the Holy Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 5 v 19). The Holy Spirit will not force himself on us against our wills – 1 Corinthians 14 verse 32, but if we resist or oppose him then his empowering will depart.

It is vital that as Christians and as a Church we depend on the Holy Spirit's power, recognising that any significant work is done through him.

Paul is emphatic in telling the Galatians that the Holy Spirit was received by faith in the beginning of their Christian life – Galatians 3 verse 2 and would continue to work according to their faith subsequent to conversion – see verses 3-5.

Questions

In the past has it been hard for you to think of the Holy Spirit as a person rather than simply a presence or force?

Has anything in this paper helped you to think more readily of the Holy Spirit as a person?

Do you think you have an awareness of relating to the Holy Spirit as a person who is distinct from God the Father and God the Son?

Have you ever been especially aware of the Holy Spirit's empowering in a specific situation of ministry?

In your own experience, in what ways does the guidance of the Holy Spirit come to you?