

## The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

### I. The Identity of the Holy Spirit

- Fully God: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the divine Trinity.
  - Divine titles: “Holy,” “of God,” “of the Lord”
  - Divine names: Yahweh (2 Cor. 3:17); God (Acts 5:3-4); named as a person of the Trinity (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 13:14)
  - Divine attributes: eternity (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7), omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10-11)
  - Divine actions: creation, revelation, salvation (see below)
- Fully personal: The Spirit is not an impersonal force (an “it” ) but the fully personal, living God (always with the pronoun “he”).

### II. The Roles and Saving Work of the Holy Spirit

- Creation and providence (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 33:4)

The Spirit is the Creator God who gives existence and life to all created things, sustains the function of creation, and guides creation toward God’s ultimate purposes and goals. Thus, the Nicene Creed affirms that the Holy Spirit is “the giver of life.”
- The incarnation and ministry of Jesus

Jesus lived in union and constant communion with Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit enabled Jesus to accomplish his mission.

  - Jesus was conceived by the Spirit (Luke 1:34-35).
  - The Spirit descended visibly upon Jesus in his baptism (Luke 3:22).
  - Jesus was led and empowered by the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14)
  - Jesus’ ministry by the Spirit fulfilled prophecy (Luke 4:18 → Isa. 61:1-2; cf. Isa. 11:1-2).
  - Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28).
  - The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11).
- The source of divine revelation in the inspiration of prophecy and the written word of God (2 Pet. 1:20-21, e.g., 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9; Isa. 59:21).

- Our union and communion with God the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit
  - The Holy Spirit brings the presence and life of God (Father and Son) to us so that the triune God lives with us and in us, and we live with him and in him.
  - The Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father, and the Father sends the Spirit to us (John 14:16, 25; John 15:26; Gal. 4:6).
  - The Holy Spirit is sent by God the Son (John 15:26; 16:7) at the request of the Son (John 14:16) in the name of the Son (John 14:26). Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:7; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:11).
  - The gift of the Spirit brings the presence of Jesus to us (John 14:18).
  - The gift of the Spirit enables us to know that we are in Christ and he is in us (John 14:20).
  - The Holy Spirit dwells with us and in us (John 14:17), and this makes us the temple of God's Spirit, i.e., the place where he dwells and reveals himself to be known personally by his people (Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20)
- Regeneration
  - Spiritual life from above (John 3:3-8; Tit. 3:5; Gal. 4:29) that brings us out of spiritual death and enables us to respond to God.
- Faith and repentance
  - Gives faith (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 5:5)
  - Leads us into repentance by convicting us of sin and righteousness (John 16:8)
- Adoption (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6-7)
- Sanctification
  - Sets us free from the bondage of sin to obey God (2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13-16)
  - Enables us to put sin to death and to live in a way that pleases God by fulfilling the righteous requirements of God's law (Rom. 8:1-13).
  - Transforms us into the image/character of Christ (Rom. 8:2-4; Gal. 5:15-25)
  - Transforms us progressively to reflect God's glory more fully (2 Cor. 3:18)
- Worship
  - Illumination: understanding and applying the word of God  
He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 16:13) who teaches us all things and brings to mind the teaching of Jesus (John 14:26) and guides us into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and the Father and declares it to us (John 16:14-15). The Spirit bears witness about Jesus (John 15:26). The Spirit reveals to us the thoughts and wisdom of God and enables us to discern and understand the revealed truth and word of God (1 Cor. 2:6-16).
  - Prayer for us, in us, and through us (Rom. 8:26-27).
  - Glorifies Christ (John 16:14)

### III. Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit gives different gifts to people within the church to serve God and others in all the different ways necessary to fulfill God's mission in the world (Exod. 31:1-6; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Pet. 4:7-11).

\*NOTE\*: The lists of particular gifts in the New Testament (e.g., in 1 Cor. 12 and Rom. 12) are NOT exhaustive; rather, they are only an incomplete list of examples that could be extended indefinitely. ALL of the gifts, talents, skills, resources, and opportunities that God gives to us are gifts of his Spirit that he desires for us to use in serving him and others in love.

- Some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit described and shown in the New Testament are miraculous gifts. For example, performing miraculous healings, receiving divine revelation in words of prophecy, and speaking in tongues, i.e., other human languages not known to the speaker (Acts 2:1-11).

- Not normative for all Christians: Many gifts of the Holy Spirit do not involve miracles (e.g., serving, generosity, administration). Contrary to the teaching of some Pentecostal Christians, the apostles' speaking in tongues in Acts 2 was a unique event in history to show that God's mission had entered a new phase with the resurrection and ascension of Christ; thus, it is not an experience that every Christian must or will have.

- Confirming the unique authority and function of prophets and apostles to lay the foundation of the church in the first century and to complete the biblical canon:

One important function of miracles was to confirm the authority of people as divinely-authorized prophets and to confirm their words as revelation from God (Exod. 4:1-17; Deut. 18:15-22; John 2:18-23; 3:2; 7:31; 10:38). Jesus bestowed miraculous gifts by the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other disciples whom he called to lead and lay the foundation of the church (Matt. 10:7-8; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12), which gave them abilities to do miracles in a repeated way that seemed to be very much under their direct control much of the time (although the power comes from God, of course). This was to establish their unique authority as Jesus' authorized eyewitnesses (Acts 1:21-22) and leaders to establish the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20) and to complete the biblical canon by writing the New Testament. Because these unique apostolic functions are now complete, the offices of apostle and prophet no longer exist in their New Testament form and function.

- God still does miracles: Throughout all of history, God sometimes does miracles. He heals people supernaturally, gives visions to people in dreams, gives some people unusual forms of guidance or gifts of discernment about seeing his hand at work in the world, orchestrates events in unusual ways, and many other things.

- Focus on Christ: The ordinary work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ by bringing people to living faith in Christ and transforming them into Christ-like people.

## Going Further

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 143-145, 154-157, 226-228.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapter 14.

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapter 19.

Fred Sanders, *The Holy Spirit: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2023).

R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Christian Focus, 2011).

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Zondervan, 2017).