

Study 7. We love the Holy Spirit (doctrine of the Spirit)

Big idea: the Holy Spirit is God and is intimately involved in the creation and redemption of the world.

Throughout this study it will be helpful to refer to the Spirit as a "he" not an "it". Ephesians 4:30 makes clear that the Spirit can be "grieved", that is, he is not a force but a person. As for the masculine "he", it is clear that God the Spirit is not male or female in the normal human sense, however in most languages it is hard to speak of someone as a person without using either male or female pronouns. Given that Jesus talks about the Spirit using the masculine pronoun "he" (John 15:26), we'll go with "he".

Observation and interpretation

Divide up these Old Testament passages and answer these two questions: how is the Spirit described (what name is he given?), and what does he do?

- Genesis 1:1-3
- Judges 14:6
- 1 Samuel 10:6
- Isaiah 11:1-3
- Isaiah 61:1
- Ezekiel 11:24
- Joel 2:28-29

The Spirit is called different names. Usually he is just "the Spirit", "the Holy Spirit" or "the Spirit of God". Sometimes he is referred to as the "Spirit of Jesus" (Philippians 1:19) or the "Spirit of Christ" (1 Peter 1:11). Occasionally he gets other titles, such as "the Spirit of glory and of God" (1 Peter 4:14) and the "Spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10).

In the Hebrew Old Testament the word Spirit is normally *ruach* - meaning spirit, breath or wind. In the New Testament it is *pneuma*, which has a similar range of meanings. So in John 3:8 when Jesus says "the wind blows wherever it pleases ... so it is with anyone born of the Spirit", the word "wind" and "Spirit" are both *pneuma*. Isn't that cool!

Read Ezekiel 36:24-27.

- What is Ezekiel looking for the Spirit to do in the future?
- Why do we need the Spirit to come?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

- What role does Paul think the Spirit had in bringing the Corinthians to faith in Jesus Christ?
- Can someone understand God's plans for the world without help from the Spirit?
- What does "a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (verse 4-5) mean?
- Can you be a Christian without the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor 12:3, Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:9-25 may help here)

All Christians have the Holy Spirit. You wouldn't be a Christian without him. His signature work is bringing people to faith in the Son Jesus. It seems likely that's what Paul means in verses 4-5 by a "demonstration of the Spirit's power" - not speaking in tongues or amazing healings, but the Corinthians own Spirit-changed hearts (see also 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

In the next passage in Acts we see a particular empowering of the first Christians for their work of mission to take the gospel to the whole world. And indeed God still empowers his church through the Holy Spirit in extraordinary ways. But this should be distinguished from the normal experience of receiving the Holy Spirit at conversion, which allows us to call on God as "Father" (Gal 4:6).

Read Acts 1:1-8, and 2:1-13

- In Acts 2:1 who is the "they"?
- What does Jesus say will happen when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples?
- Why do they need the Holy Spirit? (You may like to look back at John 14:15-21, John 14:23-27, John 15:26-27)

How is the experience of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament similar to that in the Old Testament, and how is it different? (John 16:7,13 may be helpful.)

People have different views on this question. Some thoughts:

- Like God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is a person not a force, which means he can do different things at different times. He was certainly doing things from time to time in the lives of certain Old Testament people, but there is no reason why he must be doing exactly the same things now.
- Genuine Old Testament believers were saved in the same way we are, that is, by faith (according to Rom 4:1-12 and Heb 11). It seems likely, therefore, that some of them experienced something like "regeneration" - the new birth that the Holy Spirit brings us (John 3).
- However, it also seems like the permanent (rather than temporary) filling, indwelling or coming of the Spirit upon lots of people (as opposed to a few special people like kings and prophets) is new in the New Testament. Jesus seems to point towards a new stage in John 16:7 which will start after he returns to his Father.

For further reading see Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 143-145.

Implications

1 Corinthians 3:16 speaks about the Spirit of God dwelling in the midst of his people. How can you tell if the Spirit is dwelling in the midst of a church?

According to theologian Graham Cole, the Spirit has a sort of a "divine selflessness". He does not draw attention to himself, but like a floodlight, he illuminates something other than himself. That is why we are called "Christians", not "Spiritualists" (Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 284).

J. I. Packer puts it like this:

"It is as if the Spirit stands behind us, throwing light over on Jesus, who stands facing us. The Spirit's message to us is never, "Look at me; listen to me; come to me; get to know me," but always, "Look at *him* and see *him*, and see his glory; get to know *him*, and hear his word; go to *him*, and have life; get to know *him*, and taste his gift of joy and peace." (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 66, cited in Cole, 284)

Do the Father, Son and Spirit have different jobs, or different projects? (You may like to consider Matthew 1:18-20, Gen 1:2, and Rom 8:11.)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:3-11 (or, if you have time, 12:1-31).

- What Spiritual gifts do you think you have? (What Spiritual gifts do you wish you had?)
- For whose benefit are Spiritual gifts given?

Prayer ideas

The pattern throughout Scripture is to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit. True Trinitarian prayer is not when we address each member of the Trinity by name in turn (as if we have three gods we need to give equal attention to). It is when we approach God confident that because of Jesus (John 16:23) we have the ear of our Father. The Spirit provides this assurance of adoption (Romans 8:5) and even intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26).

Praise God for the gift of his Spirit. You could use these words to begin your time of prayer:

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.