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# The Spirit of God

As with many other Bible doctrines, the clear teaching of the Scriptures about the Holy Spirit has become obscured in people's minds because of erroneous ideas. For example, it is commonly taught and believed that the Holy Spirit (or 'Holy Ghost') is the third person of a 'trinity'. Many, too, think that the Holy Spirit is possessed by men and women today, as it was in the time of the Apostles. But neither of these views agrees with what the Bible says.

## Meaning of 'Spirit'

To understand this subject correctly, it is necessary first of all to examine the word 'spirit' - a word which is used many times in both Old and New Testaments. The original word in the Old Testament Hebrew is 'Ruach'. Its basic meaning is breath or wind. In the Greek language of the New Testament, the word is 'pneuma' (from which we get our word 'Pneumatic'). It has the same meaning as 'ruach'. Our English word 'spirit' is derived from the Latin verb 'spiro'-to breathe-and so conveys the same basic idea. 'Ruach', 'pneuma' and 'spirit' all have as their primary meaning breath or wind.

## The Spirit of God in Creation

The word 'spirit' is frequently associated with God himself-the 'spirit of God'. The phrase denotes literally the 'breath of God' and, hence, that which emanates or issues forth from Him. Investigation of the passages of Scripture where the words occur leads us to the conclusion that the 'spirit' of God-his breath, effluence, emanation-is the power by which He performs His will, whether by thought, word or deed. We learn that it is by means of God's spirit that this vast universe was created, and is maintained in its state of orderliness. A few quotations will illustrate this point. The book of Genesis records the first act in the chain of events which led to this earth being made a suitable habitation for man. We read: '[. . . the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light](#)' (Genesis 1. 2,3).

Subsequently, the sun, moon and stars were made to appear. On the second day the waters were appointed to their respective places: '[And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so](#)' (Genesis 1.7). The spirit of God, then, caused the seas to be formed and the firmament or heavens to appear. Now in describing these very same events, Job declares: '[He divideth the sea with his power. . . by his spirit he hath garnished the heavens . . .](#)' (Job 26.12-13). These parallel passages form a convincing proof that 'spirit' is the 'power of God'.

The earth being prepared, the work of populating it began. Again, it was accomplished by the exercise of God's spirit, or power. First the vegetable, then the animal kingdom was created, each with the ability to reproduce itself: '[Be fruitful](#)', said God, '[and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. . . let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind . . .](#)' (Genesis 1.22,24). It was a wonderful and glorious work, and it caused the Psalmist to exclaim: 'O

Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches . . . Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth' (Psalm 104.24,30).

## The Creation of Man

The crowning act of God's creative work was the formation of man from the dust of the ground. The record states: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (Genesis 2.7).

It has already been pointed out that the basic meaning of 'spirit' is 'breath', When the breath of life was breathed into Adam's lifeless body, it was another example of the 'spirit' or 'power' of God at work. This is confirmed by what we read in Genesis 7. The chapter records the effect of the Flood that overswept the world in the days of Noah, when 'all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died' (Genesis 7.22).

The margin of the Authorised Version gives as a stricter translation, 'the breath of the spirit' (ruach) 'of life'. When God breathed the 'breath of life' into Adam, He breathed his spirit into him and the body then commenced its vital functions. It must be evident that if this spirit or power is withdrawn, the result is death. Two more verses make this quite clear. First the Psalmist: '. . . thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust' (Psalm 104.29). Then Solomon, in describing the day of death: 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (i.e. man's breath) shall return unto God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12.7). (We note in passing that these verses give no support to the false notion that an 'immortal soul' was breathed into man at his creation, and that this continues living after the death of the body. Man was merely given 'spirit' or 'breath' which endowed him with life; withdrawal of it meant that he reverted to his original lifeless state.)

Having created the Universe, the earth and all upon it, God maintains it in an organised state by means of His spirit. It follows therefore that there is no place where its influence does not exist. David emphasised this in the Psalms:

'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. . . there is not a word in my tongue, but O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell' (Hebrew sheol-the grave), 'behold, thou art there' (Psalm 139.2,4,7-8).

## The Holy Spirit

So far we have considered the spirit of God in its 'natural' or general manifestation, i.e. as we witness it in nature all around us. Its presence, though essential for our continued existence, does not intrude into our lives. Its work continues whether we as individuals recognise it or not. But there is another, more dramatic, more specific way in which the power of God has manifested itself through the ages. We refer to the 'Holy Spirit'. The word 'holy' means 'separate', 'sanctified' or 'set apart'. 'Holy Spirit' therefore denotes God's spirit or power, specially sanctified or set apart for a particular work. It was employed when miraculous results were required by God for the furtherance of His predetermined purpose with this earth and its inhabitants, and it produced results which were outside man's natural experience. It also took the form of certain powers given to men which enabled them to do or say things which were outside their natural capabilities.

The distinction between the 'spirit' and 'Holy Spirit' is conveniently illustrated by a reference to Psalm 51. David prays: 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit'

(Psalm 51.12). This is an allusion to the power of God by which all live and move and have their being. But in verse 11 David asks: 'Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me'. The Psalmist recognised that God had given him a power additional to man's normal attributes and leaves us in no doubt as to how the Holy Spirit manifested itself in his case. He wrote: 'The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue' (2 Samuel 23.2).

It was the possession of the Holy Spirit which enabled David to speak infallibly concerning his illustrious descendant who was to be born a thousand years ahead, namely Jesus Christ. So he continued:

'The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. . .' (2 Samuel 23.3-5).

The writings of David abound with references to this 'covenant' which was to have its fulfilment in Christ. In Psalm 16, for example, he was able, by the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, to foretell not only the death of Christ, but also his resurrection; and further, to set down the very words which Christ himself was to use:

'I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore'. (Psalm 16.8-11).

On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter quoted this very passage to convince his hearers that the death and resurrection of Christ should not be thought incredible-David had foretold these events long before:

'Therefore' (David) 'being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption' (Acts 2..30-.31).

## Inspiration

This introduces us to another important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit (or power of God)-that of causing the Scriptures to be written. The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written by over .30 different authors during a period of more than 1, 500 years. It is accurate, harmonious and purposeful. It could not have been the result of mere human effort-the time factor alone would preclude this. What was it that enabled the writers to make their contributions, piece by piece, so that the whole volume might well be regarded as having one author? The answer is given by Peter, writing concerning the Old Testament scriptures:

'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1. 21).

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, made a similar declaration:

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Timothy 3.16-17).

The phrase 'given by inspiration of God' is one word in the original Greek and means literally 'God-breathed'. In comparing these two passages of Scripture, we note that Peter says the writers were 'moved' or 'borne irresistibly along' by the Holy Spirit; Paul says the Scriptures were 'God-breathed'. As the word 'spirit' means 'breath', it will be seen that the two phrases mean exactly the same thing—the Scriptures were written by men who were guided infallibly by the power of the Holy Spirit. This guidance was not always borne willingly. The denunciations by the prophets, for example, were not popular with their fellow-men, and they sometimes shrank from their divinely-appointed task. These occasions give us an insight into the 'irresistible' way the Holy Spirit moved the prophets to do their duties. Ezekiel, for instance, records:

'And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me . . .' And he said, 'thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house . . .' (Ezekiel 2.2,7-8).

Jeremiah tells us:

'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay' (Jeremiah 20.9).

At other times the guidance of the Holy Spirit matched the mood of the speaker or writer, as in the case of David discoursing on his favourite theme—the coming of Christ:

'My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer' (Psalm 45.1).

## Old Testament writers possessed the Holy Spirit

Whatever the inclinations or desires of the writers of the sacred records, we find there was an unbroken line of men who recorded them by the power of the Holy Spirit. God said of Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible: '. . . I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them. . .' (the 70 elders of Israel) (Numbers 11.17). Moses' successor was Joshua, of whom God said: '. . . Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him' (Numbers 27.18). Joshua was succeeded by the Judges, of whom we frequently read: 'the spirit of the Lord came upon him'. The first king of Israel, Saul, was given the Spirit, which enabled him to prophesy—although it was subsequently withdrawn because of his disobedience. During the next 400 years, prophet succeeded prophet, all possessing the power of God to give divine authority to their words. Micah describes his mission in this way:

'But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin' (Micah 3.8).

We note, how, throughout, the Spirit or Holy Spirit is always represented as the power of God.

## The Holy Spirit withdrawn

The persistent wickedness of Israel at length resulted in God's threatened judgments coming on the nation. First the Kingdom of Israel, then the Kingdom of Judah, was overrun. Micah had warned the people of the consequences: '. . . ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer of God' (Micah 3.6-7).

This state of affairs continued for more than four centuries, which represents the interval between the Old and New Testaments. The spirit of God, by which all things exist, still remained, but the Holy Spirit was withdrawn.

## The Holy Spirit revived

Such a state of affairs was not to continue indefinitely, however. God had promised that from the family of David '. . . a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord' (Isaiah 11.1-2). This is a clear reference to the coming of Christ. (We note that here, as with many other passages in both Old and New Testaments, the word 'Holy' is omitted. There is no confusion, as the context and content of a passage clearly indicates when a miraculous element is involved, as distinct from the operation of God's 'free' spirit.)

## The Birth of Christ

The time drew on when God's promise to David was to move a great step forward. An angel was sent to the virgin Mary with the news that she was to bear 'the Son of the Highest'. In answer to her query as to how this was to come about, the angel explained:

'. . . The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God' (Luke 1.35).

Note how, in this verse, the 'Holy Spirit' is described as the 'power of the Highest', exactly in accordance with the teaching of the rest of the Scriptures- 'holy' because it was 'set apart' to perform an event unique in history, the begetting of the Son of God.

## Not part of a 'Trinity'

We may here remark that there is no scriptural authority whatever for regarding the Holy Spirit as the third person of a 'trinity' ('God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost'). The word 'trinity' does not occur in the Bible at all, nor in religious literature until the end of the second century A. D. It is a false doctrine which was gradually introduced into the early churches, and eventually became firmly implanted.

It is unfortunate that in our Authorised Version the Greek word 'pneuma' is frequently translated as 'ghost'. The American Committee of the 1881 Revised Version recommended that 'for Holy Ghost adopt uniformly the rendering Holy Spirit'-a course followed by most modern translators.

Christadelphians adopt this rendering, believing that 'spirit', scripturally understood, is the power of God.

To associate it with spectral apparitions causes needless confusion.

## The Holy Spirit in New Testament times

With the coming of Christ there commenced a new era in the purpose of God, in which His Holy Spirit played an important part. In the form of a dove, it descended on Christ at his baptism and

empowered him to do many wonderful works. The gospel records abound with the remarkable miracles he performed which extended even to the raising of the dead. These miracles provided evidence that could not be refuted, that God by His Spirit was speaking and working through Christ.

After Christ's ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the Apostles in a particularly dramatic manner. A rushing mighty wind was heard, and jets having the appearance of flaming ! fire rested upon the twelve. The effect was remarkable: '[And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance . . . every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed. . .](#)' (Acts 2.4, 6-7).

## Gifts of the Spirit

There was no mistaking the fact that the possession of the Spirit enabled these followers of Jesus to do things otherwise impossible. They were able to speak other languages without tuition. Peter healed a man lame from birth and raised Tabitha from the dead. Paul restored the life of Eutychus, the young man who fell to his death from an upper balcony. These, and many other miracles, were performed in the days of the Apostles.

In 1 Corinthians Ch. 12, Paul lists the various forms these 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' took. There were, he said,

['. . . diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kind of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues'](#) (I Corinthians 12.4,8-10).

Possession of the Holy Spirit enabled the recipient, according to his particular 'gift', to give, for example, infallible advice on matters of doctrine or practice; to restore the sick to health; to predict future events with certainty; to discern falsehood; to speak or to interpret a foreign language without previous instruction. Nor were these powers used only in private. They were employed with the object of establishing Christianity in the hearts of those who were willing to be convinced. To this end, there were many public demonstrations of the effects of the Spirit. It was the means which God used to give witness to the truth of the gospel. Paul summarised the matter when he wrote concerning the work of the apostles: '[God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will'](#) (Hebrews 2.4).

## Do men possess the Holy Spirit today?

As we observe from the many examples recorded in the New Testament, possession of the Holy Spirit produced unmistakable evidence that a superhuman power was at work. There was no argument about it, even by the opponents of Christianity. When Peter and John cured the lame man, the Jewish authorities reluctantly admitted: '[. . . for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it:](#)' (Acts 4.16). Again, at the untimely death of Ananias and Sapphira, it is recorded: '[And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things'](#) (Acts 5. 11).

How does this compare with what happens today? If the Holy Spirit is now possessed by men and women, why is it not plain for all to see? Let us take these Spirit gifts one by one. Can any, inside or outside the Church, heal the chronically ill at a word? Or has anyone been able, after the days of the Apostles, to raise a dead person to life? Can any tell the future with a positive assurance that they will be right? Can liars be instantly exposed and summarily punished? Can men speak foreign

languages they have never learned or translate tongues they have never studied? These are the ways by which the Holy Spirit demonstrated its presence in the first century. Are these things possible today? The only reasonable view is that they are not.

## Withdrawal of the Holy Spirit foretold

It should not be surprising to find that the Holy Spirit is not given to men today. The immediate object of its bestowal-the establishment of the Christian faith-was fulfilled when the writing of the New Testament was finished. With the completed Bible in our hands, we have all the evidence we need that God has spoken. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, clearly foretold that these gifts of the Holy Spirit would be withdrawn: '[. . . whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away](#)' (I Corinthians 13.8). The fulfilment of these words is true to experience. After the days of the Apostles and their contemporaries, there is no authentic record of the miraculous use of these powers. It is true that through the ages men have arisen who have pretended to work miracles in the name of Christ but the facts do not bear close investigation.

## The language of personification

There is an aspect of the subject which sometimes puzzles people, and this concerns the words of Christ in which he appears to describe the Holy Spirit as a person. As we have already seen, the Holy Spirit is a manifestation of God's power in a specially concentrated form. Why then does Christ describe it as a person such as in the following passage?

['I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. . . the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you'](#) (John 14.16-17,26).

Again,

['When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come'](#) (John 16.13).

These words are sometimes used in an attempt to show that the Holy Spirit is a person-the third person of a 'trinity'. But to put this interpretation on Christ's words makes them contradict all the other passages of scripture which describe the Holy Spirit as a power. In fact Jesus himself made clear reference to the Holy Spirit as the power of God: '[And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high](#)' (Luke 24.49).

If the Spirit were a literal person, it would undoubtedly have appeared as such in the writings of the Apostles. But the fact is that in those writings it is always presented as a power; for example, Paul wrote to the Romans, '[that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit](#)'. (Romans 15.13).

Why then did Christ speak of it as '[the Comforter](#)', and use the personal pronoun '[he](#)' in referring to it? And why did he say '[the Spirit of truth](#)', he will guide you into all truth'? (John 16.13).

The answer appears when we look into the exact meaning of the word 'Comforter'. The word ('parakletos') in the original text meant one who was called to another's aid, especially in a court of justice. In brief, an advocate. How did the Holy Spirit act in this way?

The Acts of the Apostles tells us how the Jewish religious authorities were moved with bitter hatred against the apostles, because the latter, having the gifts of the Holy Spirit, could work mighty miracles. These miracles gave practical evidence to the people that the apostles were speaking with divine authority.

The elders and priests arrested the apostles on several occasions; but they had no need to engage a defending advocate. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them, they were aided by something far more effective than the ablest human advocate. The Lord Jesus had forewarned them before his crucifixion: '[. . . for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for testimony against them. . . But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit](#)' (Mark 13.9, 11).

In Acts ch. 4 w 5-14, we find a literal fulfilment of Christ's words. Peter and John had been arrested and brought before the rulers, elders, and scribes. Peter made his defence before the court. But he spoke as the power of the Holy Spirit directed him. '[Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel. . .](#)' (Acts 4.8). He declared that the miracle of healing he had performed on the man crippled from birth had been done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified but whom God had raised from the dead. The effect on the court was remarkable: '[Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus](#)' (Acts 4. 13).

We see then how appropriate was the figure Christ used concerning the power of the Spirit. The power enabled the apostles to defend the Gospel under the guidance of the Spirit. It was, therefore, fitting that Christ should describe it as a helper, or advocate, and use the pronoun 'he'.

## **Other aspects of God's Spirit**

The Holy Spirit, as we have seen, is that part of God's power specially marked out to perform some particular work. His Spirit being all-powerful and all-pervading, it is not surprising to find that it is closely associated with other aspects of His creative work. We have already seen that God set in order the heavens and the earth by reason of His spirit moving upon the face of the waters. David declares: '[By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath](#)' (spirit) '[of his mouth](#)'. (Psalm 33.6). The 'word of God' is therefore equivalent to 'the Spirit of God'. Inasmuch as the Bible is the Word of God, it is the witness of God's Spirit with us today. It is therefore our highest wisdom to read, believe and obey it.

Another example of the power of God will be found in the work of the angels, those immortal beings who execute the divine will throughout His limitless universe. We read that God '[. . . maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire](#)'. (Psalm 104.4). The angels are termed 'spirits' because they are energised, not by flesh and blood like mortal men, but by spirit. We all die eventually because our systems gradually deteriorate with age. Flesh and blood does not sustain life indefinitely; but beings infused directly with divine power survive for ever. This is the way men and women will be rewarded by God for their obedience to Him.

## Conclusion

We can now appreciate how this subject of God's spirit and His Holy Spirit covers His whole purpose from the creation to its glorious fulfilment. It is truly a matter of great privilege that God has promised His servants a share in the wonderful future which the return of Christ will bring to this earth. The only sensible thing to do is to grasp firmly the opportunity God has offered to us in His Word, the Bible, '[that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith](#)' (Galatians 3.14). The teaching of the Scriptures is clear; all we have to do is accept it.

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