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**GOD
GIFT
AND
GUIDE**

**KNOWING
THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit Is Fully God

The church, from its very beginning, has been Trinitarian, affirming that God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We find this Trinitarian orientation on the pages of the New Testament, such as Paul's apostolic blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:13). Salvation begins with the Trinity and brings Christians home to the Trinity, as Paul rehearses: "When the time came to completion, *God sent his Son*, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, *God sent the Spirit of his Son* into our hearts, crying, '*Abba, Father!*'" (Gal. 4:4–6).¹ Here, the three-in-one saves us: God (the Father), the Father-sent Son, and the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of the Father's Son). Baptism of new believers is administered "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). God is triune.

The church, from its very beginning, has also been conscious of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As an example, one of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament offered this praise of church members: "a profound and abundant peace was given to you all, and you had an insatiable desire for doing good, while a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all."²

Fittingly, then, the earliest church creeds, or confession of the Christian faith, had a Trinitarian structure to them: they affirm belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you are familiar with the Apostles' Creed, which confesses belief "in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord . . . and in the Holy Spirit." Another early creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, expands on the church's affirmation of the Holy Spirit:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.³

We note three important truths about the Holy Spirit that the church, from its beginning, has believed.

First, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, equal in terms of nature, power, and glory with the Father (the first person) and the Son (the second person). Thus,

whatever we may affirm of the Father:

he is all-powerful, everywhere present, all-knowing, eternal, independent, loving, just, unchanging, truthful, faithful, wise, holy, good, and more;

we may equally affirm of the Son:

he is all-powerful, everywhere present, all-knowing, eternal, independent, loving, just, unchanging, truthful, faithful, wise, holy, good, and more;

and we may equally affirm of the Holy Spirit:

he is all-powerful, everywhere present, all-knowing, eternal, independent, loving, just, unchanging, truthful, faithful, wise, holy, good, and more.⁴

Wait a minute! Isn't the Father just a *little more powerful* than the Son and the Spirit? Isn't the Son just a *little more loving* than the Father and the Spirit? Isn't the Spirit just a *little more holy* than the Father and the Son? No. NO. *No*. NO. **No**. **NO!**

There is NO difference whatsoever between the three persons of the Trinity in terms of their nature, their attributes, or their divine characteristics. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot be distinguished in any way according to their power, truthfulness, knowledge, justice, independence, and more. They are the three co-eminent persons of the Trinity.

This truth leads to the next one.

Second, the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.

The co-eminence of the third person with the first person and the second person means that the praise, honor, adoration, obedience, trust, and thanksgiving that we direct to the Spirit does not differ in essence—in any way, shape, and form—from those same activities directed toward the Father and the Son. That is,

- We praise God the Father to the same extent and with the same fervor that we praise God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- We honor the Son to the same extent and with the same fervor that we honor the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- We adore the Holy Spirit to the same extent and with the same fervor that we adore the Father and the Son.

To emphasize still:

- We obey God the Father to the same extent and with the same fervor that we obey God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- We trust the Son to the same extent and with the same fervor that we trust the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- We thank the Holy Spirit to the same extent and with the same fervor that we thank the Father and the Son.

We worship and glorify our triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The first two truths lead to the third and final one.

Third, the Holy Spirit is fully God.

The creed refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Lord,” which means He is God. In addition to this, He is “the Giver of Life,” which means that, along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is the Creator of all creation and the Re-Creator of those who, by grace, are rescued from their sin and have become new creations. As Creator and Re-Creator, He is God. Moreover, together with God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Spirit is the object of worship and adoration, which further means He is God.

Of course, this truth reflects, and is supported by, biblical affirmations. For example, the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira recounts the sin of two early Christians. They attempted to deceive the church by offering a large amount of money as if it were the entirety of the proceeds from the sale of their land. The parallels in Peter’s rebuke of Ananias underscore the deity of the Spirit:

“Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has Satan filled your heart to *lie to the Holy Spirit* and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? Wasn’t it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn’t it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not *lied* to people but *to God*.” (Acts 5:3–4)

Lying to the Holy Spirit is parallel to lying to God because the Holy Spirit is fully God.

Peter's follow-up question to Sapphira is equally revealing: "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" (5:9). In the Old Testament, the expression "the Spirit of the Lord" refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel, and putting God to the test was a severely prohibited sin ("Do not test the LORD your God" [Deut. 6:16]). By testing the Spirit of the Lord, this couple committed a serious sin against the Holy Spirit, who is fully God.

Jesus underscored the Spirit's deity when He warned about committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–32). Blasphemy is any speech that insults or shows contempt for God. Moreover, only God can be blasphemed. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed, then He is God. This idea is echoed in a warning in Hebrews: continuous, grievous sinning after hearing the gospel leads to insulting the Spirit of grace, which results in divine judgment (Heb. 10:29). Such condemnation is so because the Holy Spirit is fully God.

The New Testament affirms the deity of the Holy Spirit when it attributes the divine actions of Yahweh (recounted in the Old Testament) to the Holy Spirit. For example, the transformation from spiritual blindness to freely seeing the Lord is, in Exodus 34:29–35, ascribed to Yahweh. In 2 Corinthians 3:12–18, restoration of spiritual sight is ascribed to "the Lord who is the Spirit" (v. 18). As another example, Jeremiah 31:31–34 attributes the establishment of the new covenant to Yahweh, yet the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 10:15–18) attributes its establishment to the Holy Spirit.⁵ Divine actions of Yahweh are divine actions of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is God.

Scripture also supports the Creed's confession that the Holy Spirit is "the Giver of Life," that is, the Creator. Commonly, we associate creation with the first person of the Trinity. God the Father is the one who spoke, and the universe and everything that it contains came into existence. For example, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). This truth leads us to

affirm also that creation took place through the second person of the Trinity. That is, the Father spoke creation into existence through His Word, who is God the Son: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created” (John 1:1–3). Paul confirms the Son’s active role in creation:

Everything was created by him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created through him and for him. (Col.
1:16; also Heb. 1:2)

The Father and the Son were engaged in the creation of heaven, earth, visible things, and invisible things.

But what of the third person and His role in creation? The Bible begins with an affirmation of the Spirit’s creative work: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Gen. 1:1–2). The original state of the world as spoken by the Father through His Word, the Son, was formless (unstructured), empty (void of life), dark (pitch black so nothing could be seen), and watery (without a solid surface). To say the least, the original creation was unready to host living things, especially human beings. The role of the Spirit—the one “hovering over” this undefined mass—was to ready it for the upcoming work of the six-day creation. As the Father spoke through His Word, the Spirit spurred on the raw materials to respond obediently to the creation commands. So, for example, “God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so” (Gen. 1:9). The water was

gathered, and the land appeared, by God's spoken Word and prepared by the Spirit of God to carry out His will for creation.⁶

As “the Lord and Giver of Life,” the Spirit is fully God.

The Holy Spirit is Creator. He is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son (who are divine persons). He spoke by the prophets. These truths that the church confesses imply that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, not a power, a force, or an influence. The same can be concluded by considering the personal characteristics exhibited by the Spirit:

intelligence: He knows all things, including the depths of God and the future (1 Cor. 2:10–11; John 16:13)

emotions: the Spirit can be grieved (Eph. 4:30)

will: the Spirit sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts to church members (1 Cor. 12:11)

Additionally, the activities in which the Holy Spirit engages—teaching (John 14:26), praying (Rom. 8:26–27), speaking (John 16:13), bearing witness (John 15:26)—point to His personhood. A power doesn't teach. A force doesn't pray. An influence doesn't speak. A vigor doesn't bear witness.

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, fully God.

This calls for some reflection time, both personal and in terms of your church.

1. The co-eminence of the third person with the first person and the second person means that the praise, honor, adoration, obedience, trust, and thanksgiving that we direct to the Spirit does not differ in essence from those same activities directed toward the Father and the Son. Have you ever thought about the Holy Spirit in this way? If yes, what has encouraged you to do so? If no, what has hindered you from doing so?

2. If worship, honor, and adoration are due him, do you pray to the Holy Spirit? Why or why not? To help you answer this question, think about prayers you might direct toward the Father. For example, "Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and to rise again so that I might be forgiven and have eternal life." You would *not* pray (at least I hope you wouldn't!), "Thank You, Father, for dying on the cross and rising again so that I might be forgiven and have eternal life." It was not the Father who did the work of salvation. That would be an example of a prayer you might direct toward the Son: "Thank You, Jesus Christ, Son of God, for Your death and resurrection."

Following this line of thinking, can you articulate a prayer you might direct toward the Holy Spirit? An example could be while sharing the gospel with an unbelieving friend, you pray, "Holy Spirit, please convict Meredith of her sin so that she realizes her need for Jesus" (developed from John 16:8–11). Another example could be before the reading and preaching of Scripture during a worship service, the pastor

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prays, “Holy Spirit, who inspired Scripture, please illumine Your Word so that we might rightly interpret it and, understanding it, might concretely apply it to our lives” (developed from Ps. 119:105; 1 Cor. 2:10–16). Agree or disagree?

3. How is your church doing in regard to worshipping, honoring, adoring, obeying, trusting, and thanking the Holy Spirit? What elements in its worship services prompt church members to worship Him? What aspects of its discipleship endeavors, Sunday school and equipping classes, and mentoring relationships help to form members in knowledge of, love for, and submission to the Holy Spirit? What would you like to see continue or change in this regard?

Notes

1. For further discussion, see Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

2. Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, ch. 2. ANF 1:5.

3. Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), with the addition “and the Son” from the Third Synod of Toledo (Spain) in 589. The Western church—the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches—affirms the addition of “and the Son,” while Eastern Orthodox churches do not.

4. Adapted from Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit: Theology for the People of God* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 238.

5. My thanks to Jacob Denhollander for pointing out this second example.

6. For support for this role of the Holy Spirit in the original creation, see my fuller discussion in Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 296–301.