

# The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a fully and completely divine person who possesses all of the divine attributes. God the Spirit applies the work of God the Son. The Spirit's distinct role is to accomplish the unified will of the Father and the Son and to be in personal relationship with both of them.

## The Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a distinct personal being with definite characteristics. He is not merely an impersonal force or an emanation of the power of God. (See the article on the Trinity and the discussion of modalism.)

The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19–20, “*baptizing them in [or into] the name [singular; not, names] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*” puts the Spirit on an equal plane with the Father and the Son in his deity and personhood (cf. also Matt. 3:13–17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4–5).

The personal nature of the Holy Spirit is evident in his title “Comforter” or “Helper” (Gk. Paraklētos) found in John 12:26; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7. Jesus says he will send the Comforter, who will take his place as his disciples’ helper: “*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you*” (John 16:7). An impersonal force could never provide as good a comfort as Jesus. The Holy Spirit must be personal in order to fulfill this most personal ministry.

Scripture speaks of several activities of the Spirit (see chart) that can only be performed if he is a personal agent. All of these activities of the Holy Spirit are profoundly personal and interrelate with the Father and Son in a way that could only be through the Spirit's distinct personal nature.

## Personal Actions of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit comforts (John 12:26; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)

The Spirit teaches (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13)

The Spirit speaks (Acts 8:29; 13:2)

The Spirit makes decisions (Acts 15:28)

The Spirit grieves over sin (Eph. 4:30)

The Spirit overrules human actions (Acts 16:6–7)

The Spirit searches the deep things of God and knows the thoughts of God (1 Cor. 2:10–11)

The Spirit determines the distribution of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11)

The Spirit interprets and brings human prayer before the throne of the Father (Rom. 8:26–27)

The Spirit assures believers of their adoption (Rom. 8:16)

The Spirit bears witness to and glorifies Christ (John 15:26; 16:14)

## The Deity of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit possesses all the divine attributes, as shown in the chart. When the Holy Spirit works, it is God who is working. Jesus taught that regeneration is the work of God: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5). The divine agent that brings this rebirth is the Spirit: “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it*

*is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). God’s speaking through the prophets is accomplished through the work of the Spirit. As Paul says in Acts 28:25–26, “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’” This is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9–10, which is an address from Yahweh to Isaiah. Here in Acts 28:25–26, Paul attributes the words to the Holy Spirit.*

## **Divine Attributes of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14)

The Holy Spirit is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7–10)

The Holy Spirit is omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10–11)

The Holy Spirit is omnipotent (Luke 1:35–37)

The Holy Spirit is holy (Rom. 1:4)

Furthermore, the Bible equates a believer’s relationship to the Spirit and his relationship with God. To lie to the Spirit is to lie to God: *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God’” (Acts 5:3–4). The Holy Spirit is the one who guarantees God’s redeeming work in the lives of believers, and he is the one directly grieved by their sin: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).*

## **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in nature but distinct in role and relationship. The distinct roles typically have the Father willing, the Son accomplishing, and the Spirit applying the work of the Son. The Spirit is clearly at work in the key events throughout the history of salvation, including the creation, Christ’s incarnation, Christ’s resurrection, human regeneration, the inspiration and illumination of Scripture, and the believer’s sanctification.

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### The Spirit’s Role in the Ministry of Jesus

The Spirit’s role in the human life of the incarnate Christ is often under appreciated. The Spirit brings about the incarnation (Luke 1:35), anoints Jesus for his public ministry at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21–22), fills Jesus (Luke 4:1), leads and empowers Jesus throughout his earthly life (Luke 4:14, 18), and raises Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11). The atoning work of Christ is also a Trinitarian accomplishment, with the Spirit playing a prominent role, as seen in Hebrews 9:14: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

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### The Spirit’s Work in God’s People

The reality of God’s presence is brought to God’s people by God’s Spirit. His work is central in the promises of new covenant realities. *“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28); “And I will not hide my face*

*anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God” (Ezek. 39:29).* These promises are inaugurated at Pentecost when the Spirit’s power is poured out on all nations.

The Spirit is the primary person of the Trinity at work in applying the finished work of Christ in the lives of God’s people. The acts of the Holy Spirit—rather than the acts of the apostles—are the focal point of the book of Acts. He is the one who enables the apostles to accomplish all their kingdom-advancing work. The power of the Spirit is the catalyst of spiritual transformation. Prayer, church attendance, moral living, coming from a Christian family, and knowing all the right religious words are not a sufficient basis for assurance of one’s salvation. But one clear guarantee that someone has passed from death into life is the Spirit’s work transforming that person’s manner of living. He marks the life and character of believers in a definitive way, as seen in Ephesians 1:13: *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”* (cf. 2 Cor. 1:21–22).

In the book of Acts, the Spirit’s work was often immediately manifested in miraculous gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophesying. While the Spirit may still choose to work in these ways, it is the fruit of the Spirit that is the normative and necessary evidence of God’s work in someone’s life: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law”* (Gal. 5:22–23). After the inward renewal that makes someone who has trusted Christ a new creation, the Spirit also brings spiritual understanding, convicts of sin, reveals the truth of the Word, brings assurance of salvation, empowers for holy living, teaches, and comforts.

Although the Holy Spirit’s work is evident in the life of someone who is truly born again, even believers can operate “in the flesh” (i.e., by their own self and natural ability apart from God), rather than by Spirit-empowered transformation. God is pleased when his people walk in the Spirit and thus show evidence of his work. God-honoring, unified Christian community is possible only when believers walk in the Spirit. This is why Christians are reminded to *“walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:1–3).

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## The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ

The Holy Spirit’s work can easily be neglected. Perhaps the reason for this is that one of his primary roles is to glorify Christ by testifying to his kingdom and his saving work, past, present, and future: *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:13–14). Because the Holy Spirit’s purpose is to glorify Christ, he is honored when this objective is accomplished. The Spirit’s deepest longing is that the Son be honored. Jesus is the focus of the Spirit’s ministry, and believers honor the Spirit by depending on his help in order to honor Christ. The Holy Spirit works to advance the work of Christ to the glory of the Father, and he empowers and anoints the people of God to do the same.

As seen in the chart, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ in four fundamental ways. The Spirit continually points to the beauty and wonder of the Son so that people will be drawn to him, become like him, and point others to him as well: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the*

*glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).*

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## How the Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ

The Spirit illumines the Bible (the centrality of Christ; Luke 24:27, 44–48)

The Spirit empowers gospel preaching (proclamation of Christ; Acts 1:8)

The Spirit brings regeneration (new life in Christ; John 3:5–8)

The Spirit sanctifies the believer (transformation into the image of Christ; Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2)

***Humans become like what they adore.*** The Spirit works to foster adoration of Christ so that people will become like him. Thus, sanctification flows from adoration, and both are accomplished by the Spirit in the believer’s life.

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## Implications of the Spirit’s Work

The ultimate goal of all of life is to know and love God, make him known, and thereby glorify him. This goal is accomplished primarily through the work of the Holy Spirit. Reading the Bible, going to church, Christian fellowship, spiritual disciplines, service, and worship are merely playing at religion if all of these activities are not empowered, guided, and filled by the Spirit. If he is not present, even these good things are fleshly, empty, and repugnant to God: *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:13).* A life pleasing to God involves daily dependence on the precious Holy Spirit. He is to be known, sought, and loved. His awakening and empowering have always been the essential ingredients of true and lasting works of God in the lives of his people. His work in the transformed lives of believers is the key to a Christian life that experiences God’s blessing and becomes an effective witness to a cynical, skeptical world. Because of the Spirit’s presence, true Christians are no longer slaves to sin: *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9).*

It is often too quickly assumed that Jesus’ holiness and power in ministry were because of his divine nature rather than the work of the Holy Spirit in his human life. As a result, believers may discount Jesus as their true example. In his holy living and powerful ministry, Jesus often drew on the same resources as are available to all believers, especially the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The three persons of the Trinity have now been fully revealed in redemptive history, and the Holy Spirit is bringing their work to a magnificent consummation. Many believers expect a world revival in the last days that will include all peoples. Even if such a revival does not come in the generation that is now alive, God’s people should be giving glimpses of that coming revival in the character of their lives even today. Such glimpses contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission. Jesus sent his followers even as the Father sent him (John 20:21), and living under and in that authority they are able to say with Jesus, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Luke 4:18).* When the Spirit works, the gospel will be boldly proclaimed and God’s kingdom will advance.