

What Do You Know About the Holy Spirit?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

A golden lampstand with seven lights was placed in the ancient tabernacle of Jehovah.

In the book of Revelation, we find the “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5). The number seven symbolized the perfect Spirit of God.

What do you know about the Holy Spirit?

The phrase “the Holy Spirit” is found more than ninety times in the New Testament (ASV). One would think that the average Christian would have a reasonable knowledge of this theme, but generally, that is not the case.

The Nature of the Spirit

A Personal Entity – There is considerable confusion in some segments of “Christendom” over the nature of the Holy Spirit. Some have robbed him of his very personality. The Watchtower cult alleges that the Spirit is merely the “active force” of God, not a person. Mary Baker Eddy, of “Christian Science” fame, contended that “Spirit” is a synonym for “Divine Science.” Parley Pratt, one of Mormonism’s original “apostles,” compared the Spirit to magnetism or electricity.

An examination of the evidence reveals that the Holy Spirit is a *personal* entity, not a mere abstraction. When Jesus prepared for his return to heaven, he promised his apostles “another Comforter” (Jn. 14:16). The term “Comforter” is derived from two Greek roots that signify “beside” and “to call,” hence it denotes one who has been called to the side of another for assistance. The word occurs five times in the New Testament; four of these refer to the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The final reference is to Christ as our “Advocate” (1 Jn. 2:1).

Probably the most comprehensive section of scripture regarding the Spirit is the Gospel of John, chapters 14-16. Repeatedly the Holy Spirit is represented as doing things only a *person* could perform, e.g., teaching (14:26), bearing witness (15:26), convicting, guiding, speaking, etc. (16:8, 13). These expressions cannot be forced into some figurative mode.

In a letter orchestrated by Christ’s apostles, the personhood of the Spirit is indicated by the phrase, “it seemed good *to the Holy Spirit, and to us*” (Acts 15:28; cf. 13:2). Try substituting “active force” or “magnetism” for “Holy Spirit” and see how much sense it makes! (See also: [False Ideas About the Holy Spirit](#) and [An Attack upon the Trinity.](#))

A Divine Being – That the Spirit partakes of the *divine* nature can be demonstrated clearly. For example, Ananias sold a parcel of land and donated a *portion* of the revenue to the apostles (Acts 5:1-2). However, he falsely represented the sum as reflecting the entire proceeds. Peter somehow knew of the deception and accused the ambitious rogue of lying “to the Holy Spirit.” Then with a parallel expression he charged: “[Y]ou have lied unto *God*” (vv. 3-4). The apostle identified the Spirit as *deity*.

The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of one who is deity. For example, he is the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14). Only deity is eternal. Furthermore, the term “search,” when used of God, is an idiomatic expression for divine *omniscience*. God the Father searches the human heart (Rom. 8:27), as does Jesus the Son (Rev. 2:23). Similarly the Holy Spirit “searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). This expression reflects the fact that the Spirit “is one in essence with the Father and the Son” (Lenski 1963, 106).

Finally, the Spirit is mentioned in contexts which demonstrate that he ranks as a divine person along with the Father and the Son. A believer is baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). In closing the second Corinthian epistle, Paul prays that “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” might be with them (2 Cor. 13:14). Would the apostle have addressed Christ, God the Father, and a *non-divine thing* in an identical fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:2)? There is no question but that the Holy Spirit is an equally divine personality of the Trinity association.

Functions of the Holy Spirit

Manifold operations of the Holy Spirit are explicitly stated, or at least implied, in scripture. Consider the following.

Creation – The Spirit had a functioning role in the initial creation of the universe. God’s “Spirit moved upon the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2), i.e., “an active power goes forth from the Spirit of God to the earth substance that has already been created” (Aalders 1981, 56). Job declared: “By his [God’s] Spirit the heavens are garnished” (Job 26:13, ASV). Some writers do not apply this text to the Holy Spirit, though a number of very respectable scholars do (cf. Alexander 1976, 218; Van Til 2003, 804; Erickson 1998, 874).

In an address to Job, Elihu declares: “The Spirit of God made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life” (Job 33:4; cf. 32:8); he seems to reflect an ancient view of his origin (cf. Gen. 2:7), and the Spirit’s involvement therein. Psalm 104 is clearly a song celebrating the events of the creation week (Kidner 1975, 372). Verse 30 appears to suggest that the Spirit was operative in those initial events, and in the providential design in earth’s seasonal renewals which facilitate food resources (cf. Isa. 40:12-13).

Providence – The Spirit also has a role in providence. Providence is the *indirect* operation of God through what appear to be strictly *natural* phenomena, yet there is divine orchestration in the process (see [A Study of Divine Providence](#)). In Old Testament times the Spirit appears to have been instrumental in the rise and fall of various nations commensurate with Heaven’s plan (cf. Isa. 63:10-14; Zech. 4:6), and likewise in the use of valiant men in implementing the will of God against Israel’s enemies (Judg. 14:19; 1 Sam. 10:9-10; 16:13-14).

Consider a couple of additional examples. On Paul’s second missionary journey, Paul and Silas were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in certain regions (Acts 16:6-7). Might one reasonably assume that on other occasions, when “doors” of opportunity were opened, the Holy Spirit was providentially operating in the interest of successful evangelism (cf. Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3)?

Finally, Jesus promised his disciples that if they would persist in faithful prayer, the Father would give them the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13). In a parallel text, Christ pledged their petitions would be answered by the supply of “good things” necessary for sustaining their lives (Mt. 7:11). In his renowned work, *A Critical Introduction to the Scriptures*, T. H. Horne cites Luke 11:13 as an instance of the well-known figure of speech “metonymy of the cause,” i.e., the cause is stated for the resulting effect. Matthew states the effect, the “good things” needed in life; Luke emphasizes the ultimate cause—the providential work of the Spirit (1841, 359).

The Ministry of Christ – The Spirit of God worked in the arrival of the incarnate Christ and the implementation of his work.

1. The prophets declared that God’s Spirit would endow the Lord Jesus with knowledge, understanding, wisdom, counsel, and a reverence for Jehovah, thus helping to qualify the Savior for his redemptive role (Isa. 11:1ff; 42:1ff; 61:1ff).
2. Both Matthew and Luke contend that Christ’s conception was a miracle effected by the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:35).
3. When Jesus was immersed in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit visibly appeared in the form of a dove. Additionally, the Father himself spoke from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:16-17; cf. Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:22). Thus, both *visually* and *audibly* the carpenter from Nazareth was authenticated as the unique Son of God.
4. When the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ at the time of his immersion, such was viewed as an “anointing” that bestowed special divine power for the working of signs that would verify his divine nature (Lk. 4:18; Acts 10:38).
5. Following his immersion, Matthew says that Christ was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (4:1).
6. Christ sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to supernaturally endow his apostles with the gifts necessary for their ministry (Mt. 3:11; Acts 2:33).

Divine Revelation – Perhaps the greatest point of biblical emphasis in the Spirit’s operation on behalf of humanity is in the revelation of objective truth from God, to be conveyed in the form of divinely provided *words* of instruction. Peter declared that the various prophecies of the Old Testament era were not initiated by men; rather, inspired men spoke (or wrote) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). According to one source, there are some 1,817 Bible prophecies, encompassing 8,352 verses (Payne 1973, 675). David once declared: “The Spirit of Jehovah spoke by me, and his word was upon my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2; cf. Acts 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:10-13).

As mentioned earlier, Christ declared that those commissioned to teach by his authority (this would include written documents) would be guided by the Holy Spirit, hence their words would be infallible (cf. Mt. 10:16-20).

The authentication of apostolic teaching was confirmed by supernatural signs. The apostles received an “overwhelming” measure of the Spirit’s power, figuratively designated as a “baptism” (Mt. 3:11b; Acts 1:5; 2:4). This phenomenon was limited to the apostles (in a special way), though a certain manifestation also was provided to the household of Cornelius as a means of authenticating the divine approval of the first Gentiles entering the church (Acts 10:1-11:18). There is no evidence, however, that Cornelius and his family were able to empower others with miracle-working abilities. These supernatural events were temporary; there is no record of Holy Spirit baptism subsequently. Around A.D. 60, Paul was emphatic that there is but “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5); this is the age-lasting baptism *administered by human beings* in water (Mt. 28:19-20).

The apostles were granted power to convey supernatural gifts to select persons by the “laying on” of their hands (Acts 6:6; 8:18; 19:6). (See the article, [Miracles](#).) These signs were to “confirm” the validity of the sacred message (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3), and were operative only until the completion of the New Testament (ca. A.D. 95; cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:8-16).

There are at least a dozen verbs in John 14-16 by which the Spirit of God is described as acting in a revelatory capacity. Consider the various aspects of this promise in terms of *past*, *present*, and *future* events:

1. The Spirit would bring to their “remembrance” the teaching conveyed to them by the Savior (14:26b).
2. He would “bear witness” concerning the Lord through the apostles’ instruction to the lost (15:26b).
3. The Spirit would “teach” them all things necessary to their welfare and “guide” them into all truth (14:16; 16:13a).
4. He would “declare things to come” (16:13b).

These promises applied *only* to supernaturally guided Christians in the first century, not to children of God today (see Jackson 2011, 4-7).

A reflection of the Spirit’s manifold blessings, in conjunction with his revelatory role, is observed in the following phrases. He is the Spirit of:

- “truth” (Jn. 14:17);
- “holiness” (Rom. 1:4);
- “life” (Rom. 8:2);
- “promise” (Eph. 1:13);
- “grace” (Heb. 10:29);
- and “glory” (1 Pet. 4:14).

Conversion – In the denominational community, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the process of conversion is egregiously misunderstood. A direct operation of the Spirit is *not* needed to generate faith in the conversion of a sinner, as Calvinism alleges. Faith is derived from the gospel message (Rom. 10:17). The believer requires no special

illumination of the Spirit to understand gospel truth. A measured “examination” of the Scriptures will achieve that result (Acts 17:11; Eph. 3:4). Moreover, there is no *direct* baptism in or by the Holy Spirit that occurs simultaneously with one’s conversion as some allege.

In considering the “new birth” process, Jesus’ reference to “the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5), compared with Paul’s testimony on the same theme elsewhere (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5), reveals that the Holy Spirit operates *through the instrumentality* of the spoken and written “word” (Eph. 6:17). The gospel message generates one’s faith, and this subsequently is accompanied by an immersion in water. This process facilitates entrance into the kingdom of God, otherwise known as the “body” of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Prayer – One of the most comforting passages in Holy Writ is Romans 8:26.

And in like manner the Spirit also helps our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

This text affirms what we, by experience, know all too well. We are burdened with “infirmity.” In our pain and confusion, at times we simply do not know how to frame our prayers precisely. Never mind; we are told that when we do our best, the Holy Spirit will intercede for us, expressing our needs (which arise from within us only in non-utterable sighs) to the Father. Have not each of us been so frustrated occasionally that we are at a loss to know just *how* to pray? The Spirit is there to assist us (see [The Intercession of the Spirit](#)). What a thrilling text this is!

Resurrection – Did the Holy Spirit play any role in the resurrection of Christ from the dead? While the Lord’s resurrection is generally attributed to God (Acts 2:32; Rom. 10:9, etc.), it is also a fact that Christ, in some manner, participated in *his own* resurrection (Jn. 2:19; 10:17-18). Many scholars believe there is evidence that the Spirit also cooperated in that event.

For example, one view of Romans 8:11 is that Paul argues that the believer’s body will be raised from the dead eventually by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, as also was the case with reference to the resurrection of Jesus. John Murray, in contending for this point, says: “The persons of the Godhead are co-active in the acts of redemption and will be also in the consummating act” (1968, 292). Some also see Romans 1:4 as providing support for the view that the Spirit, called “the Spirit of holiness,” was involved in the Savior’s resurrection (Cottrell 1996, 75).

Another disputed passage is 1 Peter 3:18. In some versions (e.g., KJV, NIV), and according to several commentators, this text may suggest that while Christ was “put to death in the flesh,” he was “made alive by the Spirit,” i.e., “raised from the dead by the power of God” (Hillyer 1992, 113). While this is not the most common view of the passage, Kistemaker contends that “the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be ruled out” (1987, 140). See also the notes in my commentary, *Before I Die—Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus* (2007, 106).

The Sin Against the Holy Spirit – There may be no declaration in the New Testament that strikes more terror in the human heart than the warning that whoever “blasphemes the Holy Spirit” shall find no forgiveness—ever! (cf. Mt. 12:31-32). Mark characterizes it as “an eternal sin” (3:29). In view of the multiple texts that affirm the wonderfully generous offer of forgiveness to fallen man (Mt. 11:28; Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Jn. 1:9; Rev. 22:17b), how are these passages to be reconciled with this declaration which, at least initially, appears to somewhat conflict with the immeasurable love of God for the lost? The key is to be found in the larger context of the narrative.

The Savior’s warning arose out of a controversy with the Pharisees. Christ had healed an afflicted man, and subsequently was accused by his adversaries of doing so by the power of Satan (Mt. 12:24). He refuted their argument, and then warned of the deadly and eternal transgression of “blaspheming” the Holy Spirit (vv. 31-32). The solution to this enigma is discovered by bringing two important points to light: (a) the stubborn, persistent disposition of these critics; (b) the role of the Holy Spirit in God’s great plan of human redemption.

First, Christ’s miracle-working deeds authenticating his mission were powered by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:28; Lk. 4:18; Acts 10:38). Accordingly, hostile opposition to his supernatural works was ultimately an indictment of the Spirit himself and the vital information regarding the plan of redemption. To blaspheme (i.e., to “speak against”) the Spirit, therefore, was a repudiation of the gospel message, thus alienating one from the hope of forgiveness.

Second, the deeper facts of this particular incident, as well as others of similar import, are revealed by several verbs that depict the disposition and actions of the Lord's hostile adversaries. Mark's account, for example, reads as follows:

And the scribes that came down from Jerusalem **said**, "He **has** Beelzebub," and "By the prince of demons he **is casting out** demons" (3:22).

The verbs in bold type are extremely important.

- "Said" is an imperfect form, signifying their *constant* harangue.
- "Has" (a present-tense verb) suggests a *sustained* state, reflecting their diabolical charge that Jesus was *perpetually* possessed of the devil.
- "Casting out" (a present-tense form) reveals their conviction that *all of his supernatural acts* were satanically orchestrated, hence his message was unworthy of acceptance.

Add to this the fact that Matthew's parallel account supplements the episode. To these opponents Jesus said:

You offspring of vipers, how can you, **being evil** [a present-tense form suggesting a *constant state* of rebellion], speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth **speaks** [present—keeps on speaking] (12:34).

Christ's indictment was this: *their hardened rejection of the Holy Spirit* would put them beyond salvation—*forever* if such persisted! The apostle John later would record that many of these Jewish leaders had reached a point where they simply "could not believe" because they had become "hardened" (Jn. 12:39-40).

Paul was an exception. Though he had "blasphemed," "persecuted," and "injured" the cause of the Son of God in his earlier days (1 Tim. 1:13), he subsequently had converted to the Christian "Way" (Acts 9:2, etc.). He had been convinced of gospel truth; he had seen the resurrected Savior! (1 Cor. 15:8). And he acknowledged that the message he now was preaching was by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11-13; Gal. 1:11-12).

Here is a footnote for today's reader. The testimony of the Spirit's authentication of Jesus Christ as the Son of God has been permanently documented in the written record of the New Testament (Jn. 20:30-31). To reject this inspired evidence regarding Christ is to reject the Spirit himself. Those who *pursue* and *sustain* this course of rebellion have no hope of salvation.

A study of the Holy Spirit is rich and rewarding. Perhaps this brief discussion will encourage you to investigate this exciting theme for yourself.

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Revelation 4:5; John 14:16; John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7; 1 John 2:1; Acts 15:28; Acts 5:1-2; Hebrews 9:14; Romans 8:27; Revelation 2:23; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4; Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104; Isaiah 40:12-13; Isaiah 63:10-14; Zechariah 4:6; Judges 14:19; 1 Samuel 10:9-10, 16:13-14; Acts 16:6-7; Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; Luke 11:13; Matthew 7:11; Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35; Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:33; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Matthew 10:16-20; Acts 1:5, 2:4; Acts 10:1-11:18; Ephesians 4:5; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 6:6, 8:18, 19:6; Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3; Ephesians 4:8-16; John 14:16; John 14:17; Romans 1:4; Romans 8:2; Ephesians 1:13; Hebrews 10:29; 1 Peter 4:14; Romans 10:17; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:4; John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 6:17; Romans 8:26; Acts 2:32; Romans 10:9; John 2:19, 10:17-18; Romans 8:11; Isaiah 1; 1 Peter 3:18; Matthew 12:31-32; Matthew 11:28; Mark 16:16; John 3:16; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 12:24; Matthew 12:28; John 12:39-40; 1 Timothy 1:13; Acts 9:2; 1 Corinthians 15:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11-13; Galatians 1:11-12; John 20:30-31

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