



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

the things we firmly believe

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Study 5: The Person and Work of the Spirit

The Personhood of the Spirit

‘Each person of the Triune Godhead is discrete as a person. Each has unique function, yet the Godhead is One.’¹

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach* and this word also means ‘wind’ or ‘breath’. (Psa. 148:8; Ezek. 1:4 use the word this way.) Likewise the Greek word in the New Testament, *pneuma* also covers ‘wind’ and ‘breath’ in its range of meaning (see John 3:8; Rev. 1:11). Within Greek language things have grammatical ‘gender’, which is not of necessity a statement about their nature—masculine, feminine and neuter. *Pneuma* is a neuter word.

For these grammatical reasons some have thought of the Spirit in non-personal ways, as though the Spirit were simply a force or a power. However the Bible’s teaching about the Spirit as a whole makes clear that we are to understand the Spirit as a divine person. At a grammatical level, the neuter gender of *pneuma* is mismatched with a masculine pronoun, ‘he’ and not ‘it’, e.g. John 16:13. The New Testament writers break grammatical rules to make clear that the Spirit is to be thought of in personal terms.

In John 14:16-17 Jesus promises that he will send *another* Counsellor—the Spirit of truth. In this promise the ‘another’ is important. The Spirit is going to be a ‘replacement’ for the personal presence of Jesus, who is explaining in this chapter to his disciples that he is going away to the Father (14:1-3) to prepare a place for them. Jesus has been the Counsellor (see 1 John 2:1) and the Spirit comes now in that role. A counsellor (Gk: *paraclete*) is one who takes up somebody’s case or an ally who fights on somebody’s side. ‘It is difficult to see how this parallel with Jesus or how the Spirit’s work on our behalf can be meaningfully spoken of without understanding the Spirit to have full personal qualities.’²

The Scriptures ascribe to the Spirit the elements of knowing, willing and feeling (Isa. 11:1ff.; 1 Cor. 2:12; Rom. 8:14; Luke 4:1; Gal. 5:22-23). In Isaiah 63:10 and Eph. 4:30 we are warned of the possibility of grieving the Holy Spirit—‘one can resist a power, but grieve only a person.’³

Throughout the Old Testament he is called ‘the Spirit of the LORD. In Matthew 28:18f., the Spirit alongside the Father and the Son is the name into which all believers are baptised. He shares in the divine nature as them, and is the ever-blessed object of our love and worship just as they are. Just as the incommunicable attributes of Godhead belong to Father and Son, so also they belong to the Spirit. He is called in Hebrews 9:14 the ‘eternal Spirit’. In Psalm 139:7 David muses on the fact that

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Things We Firmly Believe*, NCPI, Blackwood 1992, p. 63

² Bruce Milne, *Know The Truth*, IVP, Leicester, 1982, p. 176

³ Milne, p. 177

there is nowhere he could go to escape the presence of the Spirit, indicating the Spirit's omnipresence. Knowledge and power find their source in the Spirit, linking the Spirit to the omnipotence and omniscience of the Godhead. In Isaiah 11:2 we read:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

So also, the Spirit bears the communicable attributes of God—the righteousness, holiness, goodness, truth and love that belong to God but which human beings are made to share. (See Gal. 5:5; Rom. 14:17; Luke 2:25 (righteousness); 'Holy Spirit' throughout NT and in Psa. 51:11, Isa. 63:10-11; Rom. 1:4 (holiness); Neh. 9:20; Psa. 143:10; Acts 11:24; Gal. 5:22 (goodness); John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; 5:6 (truth); and Rom. 5:5; 15:30; 2Cor. 6:6; Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:8; 2Tim. 1:7 (love).)

The Works of the Spirit from Eternity and in Creation

In the works of God, the Father is the *initiator*, and the Son is the *mediator*. How then do we speak of what typifies the work of the Spirit? Theologians have settled on seeing him as the *agent*—the one by whom the Father and the Son work.

The Spirit was present at creation, 'hovering over the waters' (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 104:30), and in fact is present before creation. The Spirit is the Spirit of life (Job 33:4; John 6:63; Rom. 8:2; 2Cor. 3:3). As the Spirit of life, he is ever sustaining all life in creation. His bringing life out of nothing at the beginning is an important foreshadowing of his work in the New Testament of bringing new life to the dead (Ezek. 37:5; Rom. 8:11).

Just as the Spirit is intimately connected with creation's being brought out of nothing by the Word of the Father, so he is present in the actions of God in bringing creation to its final end-time goal. Throughout that history from creation to new creation, the plan and purpose of God has been worked out. The truth of creation is not only known in the fact of creation, but more so in understanding the modes, nature and goal of creation.

- The mode: by a powerful word of command, in love (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; Psa. 104:30; 148:5).
- The nature: good, i.e. functional and purposive (Gen. 1:31; Ecc. 3:11; Psa. 33:5; 119:64; Isa. 45:18).
- The purpose: the place for humanity to find its destiny as a peer community with God (Gen. 1:26-28); the place in which the fullness of God's glory will be displayed (Isa. 6:3; 11:9; Psa. 72:19; Hab. 2:14; 3:3)

Through the Holy Spirit elements of that plan and purpose of God for creation have been made known to men and women through the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the 'Spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10) and the Spirit of hope (Rom. 5:5; 15:13; Eph. 4:4).

The Spirit in History

There are dynamic forces in history beyond human activity. As well as God's own working, there are spiritual forces in rebellion against Him. History is not primarily *our* story, nor even *their* story, but *His* story. '[T]he Spirit is heading up history—as the agent of the Father and the Son—to its ultimate consummation.'⁴ The great dynamics of history are covenant expressed in promise, and the Kingdom of God—both of which relate to salvation. These great matters reach their culmination in Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, as these two great themes unfold, we see the Spirit at

⁴ Bingham, p. 69

work. The Spirit moves the prophets to speak of where covenant and Kingdom are heading in the fulfilment in Christ (e.g. Ezek. 36:24-28; 37:1-14; Zech. 12:10 etc; see 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:19; Luke 24:25-27, 44). The Spirit moves and empowers particular men and women to further the purposes of God—e.g. judges (e.g. Jdg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29), kings (e.g. 1 Sam. 11:6), artisans (Exod. 31:3), elder (Num. 11:25), and even foreign kings (Isa. 42:1—in its first application this prophecy seems to refer to Cyrus, the Persian).

When all of the prophetic promise reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, it is hardly surprising that it seems the work of the Spirit erupts into prominence. The Spirit is deeply connected to everything the God is doing in covenant faithfulness through His Son in order to renew the creation and establish His kingdom.

- Jesus' conception—many mentions in Luke 1 & 2 of the work of the Spirit (Luke 1:26-38). John the Baptist's father, *full of the Holy Spirit*, rejoices in the culmination of God's saving plan in the one coming after John, the prophesied and promised saviour (Luke 1:67-79).
- The life and ministry of Jesus: It was the Spirit who came upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22) and led him into the desert for the temptation (Luke 4:1). The Spirit empowered his ministry: Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:36-38 '... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all those who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.' He offered himself on the cross by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14) and was raised in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 1:4) and ascended by the Spirit's power also (Eph. 1:19-21).
- The ascended and reigning Lord Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit on the church (Acts 2) with a view to the Spirit being poured out on all flesh. It begins in Jerusalem, then at Samaria (Acts 8) and afterwards to the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10) and Ephesus (Acts 19). Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles are all recipients of the Spirit who makes them members of the Kingdom of God and heirs of salvation.
- Through the Church's proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, the Spirit works to bring conviction and revelation (John 16:7-15). The result of this is repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:30-31; 11:18), and regeneration, purification, forgiveness, and justification are given (1Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5-7; Acts 15:8-9). The Spirit indwells believers personally and corporately. (More of all in studies to come!)

Creation was not created into a kind of static perfection. In fact it is clear that before the Fall there is the intention of God that creation has a maturity to attain, and that the Man and the Woman are to have an intrinsic part in the maturation of creation (hence the mandate to fill and subdue and rule the earth.) Finally the goal of God, for which the Spirit works from the beginning of creation until the end, is the glorification of God, by His glorifying of humanity and the creation. Ephesians 1:3ff says:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.