

STUDY ONE

Introduction to the Theme

THE STUDY OF PNEUMATOLOGY

Pneumatology is the name given to the study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It derives from the Greek word *pneuma* which can mean ‘breath’, ‘air’, ‘wind’. We derive our English word pneumatic from it, meaning air-driven or air-filled. In the Hebrew the equivalent word to *pneuma* is *ruach* and has almost identical meaning. The question we have before us is: ‘How can we possibly study the person and work of the Holy Spirit?’ The obvious answer is: ‘From the materials provided in the Bible and possibly from our own personal experience of the Spirit himself’. Our problem is really the way in which we study the materials available. For example, we believe we have a fully developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit presented in the whole Bible. For this reason—whether or not we are correct in our claim—we have to realise that down through history this fully developed doctrine was not available as we see it now. How did those in early times understand the Holy Spirit? How did they think of him within the times of the major prophets and the minor prophets? How indeed did they think of him in the period covered by the gospel accounts, and then later in the period covered within

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the book of the Acts? Surely there has been a development or regression of doctrinal ideas within the scope of church history, whilst today there are patently many and varied views of the Holy Spirit.

This is enough to point out that the study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit is not at all simple when we seek to systematise the available materials. By nature of the case we may even do despite to a true understanding of his person and work. We will try then, as far as possible to proceed along lines which give us: (i) an overall view of the plan of God in which the Holy Spirit continually works; and (ii) the manner in which his work relates to us as persons in God's created world. It will be seen that these two elements are closely related, and are really very much the one. Our plan, then, will be roughly as follows:

- *The Holy Spirit Himself*—He is person. He is God.
- *The Holy Spirit and God's Plan*—He is agent in the plan, working in the following: creation; providence; salvation history—pre-Abrahamic history, the patriarchs, Israel, the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, the church, the current work of Christ, and the *eschaton* (end times).
- *The Holy Spirit and Man as Person*—The prevenient work of grace, love and conviction. The gifts of repentance, faith and forgiveness. Life and sanctification. Present relationships. Ultimate glorification.
- *The Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son*—Recapitulation of certain elements relating to the Messiah, the church and man. The Holy Spirit and the Father. The Holy Spirit and the Son. The Holy Spirit

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and God's people. The internal relationships of the family. The ultimate end of man and his eternal relationships.

This is an ambitious program. It will certainly be difficult to confine to sixteen studies. Students are advised to make further reading according to the bibliography at the end of this book.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF

The Holy Spirit Is Person

Psychologically we say a person is one who has intelligence, will and feeling. It can be easily shown that the Holy Spirit has these three elements, but such a statement is naive, seeing Scripture shows him to be the Spirit of life, and so the very one from whom we derive our elements of life, namely intelligence, will and feeling. We cannot easily describe life itself, although we insist that human life has the three elements we have named. What in fact we are seeking to guard against is the impression that the Holy Spirit is to be thought of impersonally, as a force or fluid, an 'it', or simply a way of speaking about God's power in His acts without the action being the Spirit himself. Part of the difficulty comes from statements in both the Old and New Testaments where the Spirit is said to 'come upon', 'fall upon', 'fill', have 'moved' men, and like terms. The words *ruach* and *pneuma* lend themselves to this kind of thinking. In our English translations the Spirit, by reason of the Hebrew and Greek languages, has often been translated 'it'. No one can complain about this but, in the New Testament especially, the use of masculine pronouns even against the neuter antecedent has sought to point to the personality of the Holy Spirit, and even

to make the Spirit masculine, although ‘spirit’ in some languages is necessarily translated in the feminine gender. In fact the Hebrew word *ruach* is feminine, which is simply a fact of grammar.

The Holy Spirit wills

Viewing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the oneness of Scripture—that is, seeing all Scripture as an integrated whole and therefore seeing the work and person of the Spirit from the purview of Genesis to Revelation (and, of course, Revelation to Genesis)—then we see him as one who wills to fulfil his work as agent in the whole matter of God’s plan. From creation to the ultimate creation he sets about doing that which is his own particular work. As we will consider more deeply, he is always the ‘Spirit of’, that is, of the Lord, of God, of Christ, of the Son, of holiness, and so forth. Hence in this sense he does the work of the Lord, of God, of Christ, and so on. We see his will as strongly defined.

Through this will he causes certain action, such as creation, renewal, the utterances of the prophets, the designing of the tabernacle and its furniture, the defeat of Israel’s enemies, the conception of Christ and his ministry, resurrection and ascension. In the New Testament he leads the church into what it must do, and to ‘walk in the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:16, AV) is to do the will of the Spirit. In this way Philip goes to Gaza and Peter to Caesarea—‘For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14). One, then, either ‘walks by the Spirit’ or is ‘led by the Spirit’. Isaiah 63 depicts Israel as being expected to do just this, which it did not. It vexed the Holy Spirit, that is, went against his will. Ephesians 4:30 and other passages warn against grieving the Spirit since he is the eschatological Spirit. He is the one who seals with a view to the day of redemption.

Will, for the most part in the human scene, is accompanied by action. Scripture depicts the Spirit as the one of action. His will is always attended with action, and very powerful action, be it creative, redemptive or eschatological. He fulfils his will. This we recognise to be part of true *personhood*.

The Holy Spirit feels

The first Article of the Anglican Church states that God is ‘without body, parts, or passions’.¹ This confessional statement is to preserve theology against crude anthropomorphism, that is, making God in our image, a merely enlarged human being. The Article thinks of God as impassible. Whatever its merits it is nevertheless true that in the Bible God is depicted as feeling love, tenderness, anger, frustration, change of mind, and so on. The Article seeks to guard us from imputing (fallen) human ways of feeling to God. We are generally the *objects* of our feelings and not the *subjects*. God is always the subject of what He feels. He cannot be caught up by passions, nor are His feelings arbitrary. They are consistent with His basic perfection of nature.

The Holy Spirit feels. We have seen in both Isaiah 63 and Ephesians 4 that the Holy Spirit can be grieved or vexed. In some places he is depicted as the Spirit of burning or of judgement, in which case he comes as terrible fire (e.g. Matt. 3:11–12; Isa. 4:4). The Holy Spirit, once vexed, can be angry (Isa. 63:10). At the same time he is the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:8). In fact all of his work, from creation to the end time must be seen as the outworking of his love. His very tender and intimate feeling is portrayed beautifully in Romans 8:26–27 where ‘the Spirit Himself makes

¹ ‘The Articles of Religion’ 1, in *An Australian Prayer Book*, AIO Pr., Sydney, 1985, p. 627.

intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered' (NKJV), or, 'with sighs too deep for words' (RSV). Romans 8:14–17 with Galatians 4:4–6 depicts the Spirit as crying 'Abba! Father!' and so generating the same cry from the believer, thus cementing the *relationship* between man and God.

We will see, eventually, that *relationships* are the primary work of the Holy Spirit. This is natural, he being the Spirit of love. For the rest, he who is the Spirit of joy and peace and similar emotional and affectional states can scarcely, himself, not be said to feel!

The Holy Spirit thinks

It may sound simplistic to speak of the Holy Spirit as thinking, but in the way of accommodating to us God says, 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the LORD' (Jer. 29:11, NKJV). He also says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts' (Isa. 55:8). We do not mean that God has to think in order to understand, but that what He thinks is what truly is. Since thinking (ratiocination) is part of what it is for a human to be a person we are helped to understand the Spirit as person when we see he thinks.

That he is intelligent is axiomatic to his being if he is the Spirit of God. He is actually called 'The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge' (Isa. 11:2), and when Bezalel is chosen to design the tent of meeting and its furniture he is said to be filled 'with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge' (Exod. 31:3). However on a much wider frame of reference the Spirit is called 'the Spirit of truth', thus embracing all wisdom and knowledge and truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:9–14 he searches the 'depths of God', and reveals great mysteries to the elect of God. In John 16:12–15 he leads '*into* all the truth',

and in fact until man is reborn of this Spirit he can neither *see* nor *enter* God's kingdom (John 3:3–6). In Ephesians 1:17 he is the 'spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him'.

In every way, then, the Spirit is the Spirit of intelligence. In fact he alone is the means by which man may know true wisdom and think true thoughts.

This one then, the Holy Spirit, wills and feels and thinks in what we may call 'the pure way'. If personhood consists in these three elements, not as separate aspects or attributes but as the one integrated whole, then far from the Spirit merely resembling true personhood he is its very epitome, its perfect actuation, its total being! Whilst he may be powerful in influence, whilst his actions may well be likened to those of fire, wind (even tempestuous wind) and water (even turbulent, flowing water), and symbols of light and oil and even of a dove be ascribed to him, he is nothing if not truly person!

For this reason any true study of the Holy Spirit must be humble, reverential, and loving. Were we to study any person such attitudes would be essential. How much more then in the case of this person who is himself the very Spirit of God!

The Holy Spirit Is God

When we recognise that the Bible is not a book which is systematic theology, and which does not go about to 'prove' our dogmas, as such, then we can understand there is no formal 'proof', as such, of the fact that the Spirit is God, or, to put it another way, has deity. The knowledge that he is God (although not *a* God) comes through in the whole thrust of his acclaim within the Scriptures, his work, and his accomplishment. 'God is spirit [Spirit]' of John 4:24 parallels with Isaiah

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31:3, 'The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit'. Only God is Spirit. Also God is not *a* spirit, but *the* Spirit.

In the Old Testament the Spirit is 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of Yahweh', 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'His Holy Spirit', 'Thy Holy Spirit'. This must mean that the Spirit is simply the manifestation or action of God Himself without being hypostasised, that is, given personhood or discrete being within himself. However, the general thrust of the Old Testament, whilst making the Spirit the very manifestation of God Himself, also gives him discrete being and personal operation such as in 'The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1:2). This could of course be translated, 'The wind of God was moving across the face of the waters', in which case wind is an entity, and not to say, God Himself, other than in the form of manifestation. It is what happened as a result of the wind ('Spirit', *ruach*) moving that gives the dynamic of the action. C. K. Barrett says:

The [*ruach elohim*] was, along with the creative speech of God, the agent by which the present existing world was brought out of the inchoate primeval waste.²

Hence when we say, 'Spirit of the Lord', and so on, we always mean the action of God through this means or agent. Whilst he is 'The Spirit *of* the Lord' and so does the work of the Lord and not some work of his own, it is true to say that the work which *is* his own, is the work of the Lord. *He does what only God can do!* How then does he do this without being God? We will see that he is in the work of creation, all

² C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and Gospel Tradition*, SPCK, London, 1975, p. 18.

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of salvation history, salvation itself, and the consummation of the eschaton.

We have then but to see *the kind of work* the Spirit does to realise that he is God. We are told that ‘God is love’, and we see that he is the Spirit of love. He is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20; cf. Luke 10:21; John chs. 14, 15, 16), the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:4–6), as well as being the Spirit of Messiah (Rom. 8:9–11). The high statements which call him the Spirit of life and ascribe created and redeemed life to him place him above being a mere emanation of God. See Psalm 104:30, ‘When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground’ (cf. Isa. 32:14–15; see also Ezek. 36; 37; John 3:6; Rom. 7:6; 8:2–3; 2 Cor. 3:6).

When we conclude that the Spirit of God is God we may know very little of what we are saying and meaning. When we speak of him as person we may still understand very little. To know God is not merely an intellectual matter, and most of us have no ontology of God. Much less do we know the reality of the personhood of Father, Son and Spirit. However, we do have the very same Spirit, the Spirit of God, to teach us, and he is *the* teacher (see John 14:25–26; 16:12–15; 1 Cor. 2:12; etc.). To those who are redeemed, the apostle John says, ‘you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know’, and ‘his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true’ (1 John 2:20, 27).

Let us then press on to read, learn, and understand the person and work of this wonderful Holy Spirit.