

*The Holy Spirit***Aaron Smith, Ph.D.**Experience: Associate Professor
of Theology at Colorado Christian
University*The Holy Spirit***Central theme of our course:***God wills to be God in the life-act of His word.*

When we speak of “spirit” there is a temptation to presume that there is no need for external authority.

Presumption of functional, internal spiritual sensitivity is identifiable across the liberal-conservative continuum.

If there has been one area in the history of Christian theological discourse where the temptation to depart from the central theme of our course—the truth that God wills to be God in the life-act of His Word—if there has been one point where the freedom has been assumed to think and speak of God on a different basis and along a different line of inquiry than Jesus Christ, it has been the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is as if when we come to this dogma the door is flung open to a whole new room in the house, where suddenly the relationship between God and man is not determined by God’s self-determination to be this God and for us to be His people, but the other way around. Here, in this new space, we may think of God in terms of humanity—of an inbuilt capacity for transcendence, of a ready point of contact for deity, of the divinity in us and around us in the world.

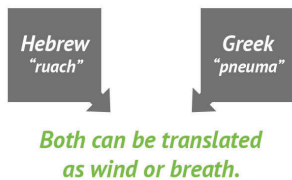
If there was one term, in other words, where the presumption of comprehension is immediate and unqualified, its definition ready-to-hand for all who introspect even for a moment and in a cursory way, it is the word spirit. This modality is assumed to be so basic to humanity, particularly by religious persons of nearly every stripe, that there is no need for an external authority to speak to us about it. Indeed, appeal to an external authority would seem already to violate the very intuition of spirit as an innate awareness of the numinous in us and about us. This radar for the divine is so intimately woven into the fabric of our being that to look upon it from without is already to be off of its grid and anesthetized to its operation.

The presumption of functional, internal spiritual sensitivity is identifiable across the liberal-conservative continuum. Both sides witness a conflation of the Holy Spirit into the human spirit. On the liberal side, this has taken place by confusing cultural ideals with the movement of God in history. It has meant, for instance, identifying the kingdom brought about by God’s Spirit with nationalist utopias, as in late 19th and early 20th-

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Conservative view: confusing the: experience of inspiration in singing or “worship”; feelings of warmth and security in response to nature, beauty; concept of relationship with encounter with the Holy Ghost.

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The Spirit is the power of God

century German theology. On the conservative side, it has meant confusing the experience of inspiration in singing or “worship,” feelings of warmth and security in response to nature, beauty, and the concept of relationship with encounter with the Holy Ghost.

This lecture will try to correct experiential and reductionist accounts of the Holy Spirit by disentangling Him from the human spirit. It will return us again to our main theme: God wills to be God in the life-act of His Word, and thus we think and speak of the Spirit also in terms of the Word. The Spirit is not a second revelation of God alongside Christ Jesus, operating at the level of special, sixth-sense intuition, but the power and authority of God’s revelation in Christ Jesus, operating among the faculties of embodied perception and activity. In this respect, the Spirit is reiteration a third time of the single life-act that defines God’s being from all eternity. He is Spirit of the Word.

Both the Hebrew term for spirit, ruach, and the Greek pneuma, can be and often are translated “wind” or “breath.” One challenge of Bible translation is to determine when in context “breath” or “wind” would be more appropriate than “spirit.” In Genesis 1:2, is it the breath of God (ruach elohim) that is bearing upon the waters or the Spirit of God? Or, in John 3:8, is it the wind (pneuma) that blows where it wills or Spirit?

It is important to be aware of the etymology of “spirit,” because it prevents us from thinking in overly static terms about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is active or, if we may, He is activity. In thinking and speaking of God’s Spirit, we cannot leap to notions of thingness or fixed figure, as if His form could be sculpted, painted, described, or in some way circumscribed by the measures of human sensation. The Spirit cannot be frozen in any sort of statuelike depiction, for He simply is God’s movement, His advancement outside Himself upon chaos, darkness, and nonbeing.

The Spirit is the power of God, His limitless authority over Himself, first, and over all that He is not, secondly. The Spirit is the right of God in exercise to be God with humankind: His capacity for humanity, His active rule over humanity, and His command to humanity.

The Spirit is the capacity of God for humanity in that He gives and sustains life. “The Spirit of God has made me,” says Elihu in Job 33:4, “the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” It is by God’s active breath that we draw breath. The psalmist makes this

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*The Spirit is God's continuing **rule** over humanity.*

explicit: "When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:29-30). In the Spirit, God's will to be God-with-us takes action. He gives us breath and we live before Him.

The life-giving capacity of God is illustrated in the biblical metaphor of water. The Spirit is spoken of as the water of life in John 7:37b-39a. Jesus says, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit," John explains, "whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

The Spirit is also God's continuing rule over humanity. We claim no self-governance independent of God's Spirit. He is the condition by which we live and move and have being. Any self-governance that we enjoy is simply the gift of the Spirit, the means and concrete shape of our individuated response to God. The Spirit is the condition of our embodied obedience to God.

Three common biblical metaphors for the Spirit—oil, fire, and seal—each demonstrate that He is the condition of our living and being specifically as God's own creation. The Spirit is spoken of as God's anointing, for example, in Acts 10:38. He is thus associated with the oil used to anoint kings and prophets.

Thus in Psalm 45:7, where the good king loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and is given special standing among his companions because he has been anointed "with the oil of joy," it is not the oil itself that is significant, as if the king was doused with a magical potion. It is God's act upon the king, His bestowal of His Spirit, which causes the king to live and function as he does.

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*The Spirit as God's refinement: **Fire***

Isaiah 4:4, Matthew 3:11, Acts 2:3, and 1 Thessalonians 5:19 all speak of the Spirit as fire. While fire can denote enthusiasm or zeal, more commonly it suggests refinement. So in Isaiah 4:4, the Lord "will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire." It is by the Spirit's refinement of the dross of sin that we attain the genuine humanity spoken of in Lecture Nine, that we are lifted out of our predilection to self and placed in a concrete relationship of obedience to God.

The Spirit is depicted as the living rule of God by which we have our living and being in that He is the seal of God. Ephesians

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The Spirit the command of God to humanity.

- Prophecy
- Truth
- Teaching
- Intercession

It is by the Spirit that the life and teaching of Christ Jesus are made manifest and comprehended.

1:13b-14a teach that, “having believed, you were marked in [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” The Spirit is likened to a king’s seal upon a letter, which is the guarantee of his authority over the contents of that letter. Hence, it is not just by the anointing and cleansing of the Spirit that we live and act as God’s own, not just by His inspiration and purification, but also by the assurance, by the pledge and security of the Spirit to see the work of God upon us brought to completion. The rule of God in and by the Spirit is also His steadiness, the constancy of his faithfulness to be our God and to refuse our self-rule.

Finally, the Spirit is the command of God to humanity, God’s decree and instruction. The content of the Spirit’s work among humanity is simply the content of God’s revelation spoken to humanity in His Word. He is the Spirit of prophecy in Genesis 41:38-39, 2 Samuel 23:2, 2 Kings 2:9, Isaiah 11:2, Luke 2:26-32, and Acts 2:1-4. It is by the Spirit that God communicates His will and intentions for humankind. He is our Teacher and Helper or “Paraclete” (from Gk. *parakletos*). He is the “Spirit of truth” in John 14–16, who makes God’s desires for the world known, “convicting the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment,” says John 16:8. He is our “intercessor” according to Paul in Romans 8:26-27, who expresses our desires in groans beyond words “in accordance with God’s will.”

Therefore, it is above all by the Spirit that the life and teachings of Christ Jesus are made manifest and comprehended. John 16:13-14 make it clear that the Spirit’s work is to make Christ known (and not Himself or some other spirit). “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth,” Jesus tells His disciples. “He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

Just as the life and work of Christ Jesus made the Father known, so the life and work of the Spirit make Christ Jesus known as the exegesis of the Father. The Spirit, as we have said, is God a third time, in unity with yet differentiated from God a second time and God a first time.

The most important historical development in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had to do with the question of the Spirit’s identity as God

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Pneumatomachi: Fighters against the Spirit

- Like God, but not identical to God
- Subordinate to or less than the father

a third time. Can we speak of the activity of God—His power and authority over us, His capacity for humanity, rule over humanity, and command to humanity as a distinct person—such that we are dealing in this collective activity with fully God in differentiated continuation of His being the Creator and Reconciler? Initially, some said, “no,” the Spirit is not God in a way that the Creator is God and the Reconciler is God.

Just as there were those who held a critical attitude toward the Son’s divinity, so there were those who refused to confess that the Spirit is deity. In the mid-fourth century, a group emerged known as the pneumatomachi. Loosely translated, this means “fighters against the Spirit.” It was a collection of leaders in the church who recognized the existence of God’s Spirit, but considered Him to be of a substance like God’s, yet not identical to God’s. In this regard, they were also known as “semi-Arians,” referring to the teachings of Arius concerning the Son, which we discussed last time. Like the Arians with respect to Jesus, the pneumatomachi believed that the Spirit was simply a thing or agency through which God created and interacted with creation, but not the Creator Himself. He was subordinate to or less than the Father. They too were unable to reconcile monotheism on the one hand and Platonic notions of deity on the other with the Christian claim that the Spirit of God comes to us as if he was God himself.

Just as the church fathers answered Arius by appealing to the functional equality that Jesus exhibited with God, so did they answer the pneumatomachi by demonstrating that the Spirit’s work is properly divine work. Just as Jesus did what only God could do, so also the Spirit.

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Second Ecumenical Council: Nicea-Constantinople

- Acknowledged the Spirit’s divine work and Person
- The Spirit acts as Lord
- The Spirit is the object of worship
- The Spirit spoke through the prophets

At the second ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea-Constantinople in 381, the church expanded its confession of faith in the Spirit to include acknowledgment of His fully divine work and, by implication, person. Whereas the third article of the creed from the first council of Nicea in 325 simply said, “We believe in the Holy Spirit,” the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed continues, “the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and later in the West, ‘and the Son’], who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets.” The Spirit acts as Lord. He gives life. He is the object of worship. He spoke through the prophets. He does, in short, what God does, receives what God receives, and so is coeternally and coequally God.

*The Spirit's life and work are
in making the Word known.*

| *The Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit
=
Spirit of the Word

| *The Holy Spirit*

*The Spirit changes
our character*

But as fully this God, the Lord who is Servant and Servant who is Lord, the Spirit does not seek an independent majesty, a self-serving worship distinctly His own, a glory in abstraction from or in addition to the Word. His life and work are in making the Word known, or again, making God known in and as the Word, not in some distractive life and work of making God known outside of the Word.

His glory is in the glory of God's revelation in Christ Jesus. The Spirit is not the spirit of liberty from God's Word, the spirit of freedom now to exercise some falsely assumed capacity for God outside of the Word, the spirit of nature, experience, mystery, or beauty, perhaps. These spirits sound exciting, but with a little introspection all turn out rather quickly to be human spirits or, worse, tempting spirits of darker powers. In opposition to all such specters, the Holy Spirit is unambiguously Spirit of the Word.

He is God externally to us who has His being in coming to us, as is true of God in Christ Jesus. He is not God in synthesis with us, as if by turning to the Spirit we could think and speak of God by thinking and speaking of ourselves—with the appropriate piety, sternness, enthusiasm, and volume, of course. No, He is Lord over us just in the act of being among us, of taking up the stuff of our realm without losing Himself in so doing. Once more, the Holy Spirit is God a third time, fully this God, God in continuation of who He was in the beginning, is now, and will be.

As such, the Spirit is the power and activity of God's salvation here and now. He is the redeeming work of God, bringing to completion God's acts of creation and reconciliation. He is the ongoing execution of God's decision to be Lord over all forces of chaos, darkness, and death.

There are three components to the Spirit's actualization of God's salvation today: an ontological, a didactic, and a relational component. In the first place, the Spirit gives us new being in the world. We are "regenerated" by His power. Quite simply, He transforms us from entities bound to sin and headed for death and nothingness into living subjects of God's forgiveness and vivifying grace.

The Spirit changes our character. He purifies our hearts and minds, making them receptive and responsive to the Word of God rather than hostile and indifferent. He cleanses our self-serving, self-gratifying ways of thinking, feeling, and acting and makes us

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The Spirit changes our condition

The Spirit works to make us holy.

steadfast in our obedience to God, as David entreats in Psalm 51. He makes Christ's living and dying tangible to us, the framework of His living before the Father becomes the framework of our living so that it might be said of us that by the Spirit of Christ we are children of the Father and enjoy life in God by participation in the life of the Son.

By purifying our hearts and minds and making us receptive to the Word of God, the Spirit also changes our condition. He breaks the chains of our bondage to sin and sets us free to move about within the wide space of God's grace. More exactly, He makes us to live by faith and not by the vices and values of sin. He liberates us from the tyrannies of fear, vanity, greed, lust, and power that ensnare our thoughts, words, and deeds. He re-creates within the deadness of our lives the faculties—the impulses, perceptual frames of reference, cognitive patterns, volitional desires, and corporeal behaviors—by which we actually, truly live as God's people, God's creation, God's image. We are no longer our own but are offspring of the Father by the work of the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This active power of God in the Spirit to change our character and condition, making us again like Him, in His image, can be understood as the Spirit's work of making us holy. He is the Holy Spirit because He is the Spirit of holiness, of restoring to humankind the original condition of its unity with God in the garden, the relational priority of God and our obedience to His will. In this respect, we think rightly of "sanctification" when we understand it as part and parcel of the Spirit's work of regeneration.

In the second place, there is a didactic component to the Spirit's saving activity. Not only does He give us the "eyes and ears" of faith, but He also supplies to our perception a right understanding of God in Christ Jesus. He teaches us everything that there is to know of God, as is indicated in 1 John 2:27. Yet as this passage further indicates, the Spirit is the fullness of our knowledge of God specifically by imparting God's self-knowledge in Christ Jesus. John's admonition against other teachers is concretely against those who deny that Jesus is God's anointed. They do not know the truth because they do not know the Word made flesh. We know the truth not because we have an extrasensory grasp of the beyond or some such foolish thing, but just as concretely because the Spirit makes the incarnate one real to us, placing Him before us as the revelation of very God.

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The Spirit gives us a correct understanding of God in Jesus Christ.
 - Imparts God's self-knowledge in Jesus
 - Makes the incarnate One real to us

The work of the Spirit has a relational component.

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Coming Up Next
 - Lecture 13: The Spirit's Work in the Beginning
 - Lecture 14: The Spirit's Work in the End

This is an important point, because once again it sets us in the appropriate position relative to God, a posture of receptivity rather than pretentiousness. The Spirit is our corrective before He is our confidence. Indeed, He can only be our confidence by first correcting our mistaken self-projections. The Spirit is not blanket affirmation of every instinct that we have regarding deity. What confidence is there in that? He is certainly not a cipher for every notion of religion, morality, and righteousness that we individually percolate up from the deep recesses of our fallenness. Rightly understood, as our instructor and trainer, the Spirit is the end of religion, and not its beginning. He is the condemnation of our idolatrous instincts, not their secret source.

In the third place, we identify a relational component to the Spirit's saving work. As he makes Christ Jesus known, placing Him before humankind as its reality, its source and goal, reframing our perceptions around Him, rewiring our cognition to think in terms of Him, re-cadencing our hearts to beat after him—as He does this, the Spirit knits us together as the body of Christ. Once again, the first fruits of authentic humanity are manifest in the repetition of God's life on earth among His people, the mutuality and self-deference even unto death encountered in the true church. Humanity's re-creation is the basis and shape of its creation and not the other way around.

With that firmly in mind, we may now make our final turn in these lectures. We will look in Lecture Thirteen at the Spirit's work in the beginning in creating, and in Lecture Fourteen to His work in the end in restoring all things to their created unity with God.