

The Holy Spirit as God



SABBATH—JANUARY 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 5:1–4; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11; Isaiah 63:10–14; Titus 3:4–6; Romans 8:11; 1 Peter 1:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “May the grace¹ shown by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love that God has given us, and the sharing of life brought about by the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14, NIV).

THE BIBLE SHOWS US WHO THE FATHER IS. It also shows us that He is God. Both the truth of who the Father is and the truth that He is God are never in doubt in the Bible.

The Bible also clearly declares Jesus to be God. And it shows who He is. The New Testament especially declares this truth in the Gospels² and the letters.

The Bible also teaches that the Holy Spirit is God. But this truth is not as clearly shown. Instead, the Bible hints at this truth in different verses. We need to compare³ verse with verse in order to study carefully what God has shown in His Word about the Holy Spirit. When doing so, we should not say something is true that the Bible does not say is true. And we should not ignore what the Bible declares as truth.

The study of who the Holy Spirit is demands a heart that is both teachable and meek (not proud). We should not make our own ideas about God the standard (rule) of how the Holy Spirit should be understood. Instead, we should accept as truth what the Bible teaches. Some of these teachings may be hard for us to understand fully. But we must accept these truths above our own opinions.

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

3. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD (Acts 5:1–4)

The Bible does not give a clear outline for who the Holy Spirit is or what He does. Instead, we find interesting hints about Him. These hints show that Bible writers believed the Holy Spirit to be equal with God. There are several Bible verses in which the same work that is connected with God also is connected with the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 5:1–4. What can we conclude about God and the Holy Spirit from Peter’s words to Ananias?

Suppose the Holy Spirit were not God. Then Peter would have been speaking here in a very careless way. Worse, his words would be fatal and misleading. However, Peter puts God and the Holy Spirit on the same level. In verse 3, Peter asks Ananias why he has lied to the Holy Spirit. Then at the end of verse 4, Peter says, “‘You [have not] lied to just anyone. [You have] lied to God’ ” (NirV). So, Peter clearly shows that the Holy Spirit is equal with God. His point is that Ananias was not just lying to the apostles (teachers and leaders), but to God Himself. Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. The Holy Spirit is God. That point is made here very clearly.

But why is there such a harsh punishment for what Ananias and Sapphira did? We must remember that the believers of the early church in Acts were “agreed [one] in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32, NirV). This agreement (oneness) was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts and minds. Then because the believers agreed in heart and mind, they freely shared what they owned. So, for Ananias and Sapphira to lie about what they shared was to go against the agreement of the believers to share what they had. The lie of Ananias and his wife denied the truth of the Holy Spirit that made it possible to be one in heart and mind in the first place.

In this way, the lie of Ananias and his wife gave a false picture of the Holy Spirit’s work in the early church community. Such lying toward God is destructive. Instead, God wants us to serve Him with our whole hearts.

Think how easily Ananias and Sapphira may have excused their sin: *After all, have we not sold our own property and given some of it to the church?* What does this story tell us about how careful we need to be to not make excuses for our poor actions? Why is it wrong to make the wrong things we do seem right in our eyes?



God wants us to serve Him with our whole hearts.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE DOES (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11)



The Spirit can do miracles. He caused a virgin to give birth to Jesus.

Many Bible verses describe who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. He is shown as doing the same work that God does. The Bible also describes the Holy Spirit as being the same as God in many ways.

The following verses list special things about the Holy Spirit that are also true about God. What are those things? Compare 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11 with Isaiah 40:13, 14. Read Psalm 139:7 and Luke 1:35. Compare Hebrews 9:14 with 1 Timothy 6:16. Compare Romans 15:19 with Psalm 104:30.

Paul argues that only One who is equal to God can know the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11). In other words, no one knows God as well as the Spirit of God. This is because the Spirit of God knows God from the inside. The Holy Spirit knows God in a way that an outsider does not. So, the Holy Spirit is indeed omniscient (all knowing; knowing everything).

The Spirit can be found wherever God is. There is no place we can run to where the Spirit of God is not. The Holy Spirit is indeed omnipresent (everywhere at once) (compare with Psalm 139:7).

The Holy Spirit is said to be “eternal” (Hebrews 9:14). In the Bible, how many eternal beings are there? The answer is that only God is eternal (1 Timothy 6:16). Yet, the Spirit is called eternal. So, He must be God.

The Holy Spirit also is all powerful. In Luke 1:35, the wording “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the Most High” (NASB) mean the same thing. Here they both refer to a miracle of the highest power, the virgin birth of Jesus. In Romans 15:19, the apostle Paul makes it clear who gave him the power to do his ministry (work done for God). The Holy Spirit gave the apostle the power to do “mighty signs and wonders” (NKJV). Indeed, the Holy Spirit can do divine miracles.

Jesus also says that “blasphemy⁴ against the Spirit” is unforgivable (Matthew 12:31, 32, NKJV; read also Mark 3:28, 29). This truth makes no sense unless the Spirit is God.

But perhaps the most amazing work of the Holy Spirit is His ability to change human hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit is the One who makes a new spiritual birth possible (John 3:5–8). And He has the power to do what only God can do.

DEFINITIONS

4. blasphemy—1. great disrespect shown to God or to something holy. 2. the act of claiming to be God or to be like God.

HINTS IN THE BIBLE (Isaiah 63:10–14)

There are many verses that point to the Holy Spirit in the Bible. These verses refer not only to the Holy Spirit but also to God.

Read Isaiah 63:10–14. Compare these verses with Numbers 14:11 and Deuteronomy 32:12. To whom was the writer referring in these passages? What does this fact tell us about how the Holy Spirit is God?

Isaiah 63:10 tells us the people “rebelled” (fought) against the Holy Spirit. The people caused the Spirit to grieve⁵ over their sins. However, the same story in Numbers 14:11 says, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will these people not respect me?’ ” (NirV). And in Deuteronomy 32:12, we are told, “The LORD was the only one who led Israel. No other god was with them” (NirV). Obviously, the Bible writers thought that God and the Holy Spirit were equal to each other.

Compare 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 with 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:11 with 1 Corinthians 12:28 also. How are the Holy Spirit and God referred to in the same way in these verses? What same thing are these verses saying about both God and the Holy Spirit?

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, Paul uses language that is much the same as the language he uses in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. For Paul, to have the Holy Spirit is to have God Himself live within one’s heart. Paul puts the wording “God’s temple” (NIV) on the same level as the temple “of the Holy Spirit” (NIV). By doing so, Paul points out that the Holy Spirit is God.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul writes that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the spiritual gifts to each believer. A few verses later in 1 Corinthians 12:28, we are told that it is God who gives the gifts. The basic message is clear: the Holy Spirit does the same work that God does. This truth offers powerful proof that the Holy Spirit is equal to God.

Read again Numbers 14:11. In what ways might the situation described in this verse be applied to us today? Think about the miracles that God has worked in our church. Think about all the reasons He has given us to believe. How can we make sure we are not doing today what God’s people did thousands of years ago?



The Holy Spirit lives within the temple of the heart.

DEFINITIONS

5. grieve—to feel terrible pain and sorrow; to mourn.

DIVINE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Titus 3:4–6)

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us from the dead.

The Holy Spirit does certain works. But these are works that the Bible says only God can do. So, the Holy Spirit is at work in the divine act of Creation. He is just as active in God's work of making sinners new.

Read Titus 3:4–6. How does Paul describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of making us new?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned side by side with “God our Savior” (Titus 3:4) in the discussion of our new birth. This is because the Holy Spirit makes our hearts new. He awakens our desire to follow Christ. He is the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2). He is the One who sanctifies (makes holy) sinners. He changes our characters.⁶ And He helps us to be obedient to Jesus Christ, who saved us. Only a Divine Being can do such wonderful things.

Compare Isaiah 6:8–10 with Acts 28:25–27. Who do the writers of the Bible in these verses say is doing the speaking?

There are some verses of the Bible in which the Bible writers say that God is the One who is speaking. But other Bible writers say that the Holy Spirit is speaking in those same verses. We are also told that the Holy Spirit gave the Bible to us (2 Peter 1:21). But in other places, the Bible says that God gave the Bible to us (2 Timothy 3:16). Giving the Scriptures (the Bible) to us, then, is another divine work of the Spirit.

What does Romans 8:11 teach us about the divine character of the Holy Spirit?

The Bible states (says) that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. It also says He will also raise us through the Spirit. Only God has the power to raise people from the dead. So, the Holy Spirit is God.

What changes can you make that would cause you to be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit? That is, what practices (habits) might be keeping you from clearly understanding His leading in your life?

DEFINITIONS

6. characters—who people are. The thoughts, feelings, and actions make up a person's character.

DOES IT MATTER THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD? (1 Peter 1:2)

What would be lost if the Holy Spirit were not God? Suppose, for a moment, the Holy Spirit were not fully God. Then the results for salvation would be serious. The Bible tells us that it is the job of the Holy Spirit to give new spiritual life to believers. So, the Holy Spirit lives within believers and fills them. He renews our thinking and changes our characters. He has the power to resurrect.⁷ And He makes Christ's followers be as God is: holy. Again, suppose the Holy Spirit were not God. Then how could we be certain that He could do any of these things in a way that God would approve?

Read 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Matthew 28:18, 19. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in these verses side by side with God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Son. What does this fact tell us about the praise and deep love that the Holy Spirit deserves and is worthy of in our worship of God?

The fact that the Holy Spirit is divine helps us to relate to Him in ways that accept and honor Him for who He is. Our spiritual lives depend on His being God. The New Testament church does not hesitate to mention the Holy Spirit side by side with the other Two Members of the Godhead.⁸ The Holy Spirit, then, occupies the same rank and level of importance in the act of baptism as do the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit, then, is lifted up as a worthy object of worship in the New Testament. He is lifted up as God not just in baptism and in the benediction of the apostles. But He is lifted up also in our never-ending need to depend on Him for all spiritual good. So, we should obey Him as our Divine Teacher and Sanctifier (the One who makes us holy). Does it matter that the Holy Spirit is God? Yes, very much so. We must know who He truly is. And we must know and believe that He is God. Then we will honor His work. And then we will depend on Him for our own personal growth and sanctification (the act of being made holy).

Think about what it means that the Holy Spirit is God Himself and that He is working in your life. What great promises do we have that show that God is working in us to change us into what we can be in Him? Why is this truth uplifting (helpful) and positive?

DEFINITIONS

7. resurrect—to return someone to life from the dead.

8. Godhead—the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit make up the Godhead. They are Three Persons who are One God.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Misrepresentations [False Ideas] of the Godhead,” pages 613–617, in *Evangelism*.⁹

This week we have learned that there is very strong proof in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is divine. At the same time, believing that the Holy Spirit is divine means more than simply accepting that He is equal with the Father and the Son. We must depend on, and trust in, the saving work of God the Father and the Son through the power of the Spirit. “It is not necessary for us to be able to explain just what the Holy Spirit is. . . . The Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain who He is because the Lord has not shown that truth to them. There are verses in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. Men may try to put these verses together to create a picture of who they think the Holy Spirit is. But accepting these strange views will not strengthen the church. The Holy Spirit is a mystery that is too deep for human understanding. So, it is better to remain silent about what we do not understand than to speak as though we know.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 51, 52.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Austrian philosopher (thinker) Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” He was referring to something quite different from what Ellen G. White was writing about in the quote above. But the principle (important rule) behind what both writers said is the same. So, why is it better to keep silent about certain truths and mysteries of God that have not been made clear by the Holy Spirit?

② Sometimes it is helpful to think about a certain belief by asking the question, What would be lost if the belief were untrue? Now think about the Holy Spirit and ask the following question: What would be lost if the Holy Spirit were not fully God?

③ How is the following quote useful to our spiritual lives? “The Holy Spirit is to fill us. But He is not some force or feeling or power that has no personality. He is a Divine Person. He is to be received into the heart with deep meekness,¹⁰ worship, and obedience. In the end, it is not a question of our having more of Him, but of His having more of us—yes, all there is of us.”—Adapted from LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter [The Holy Spirit]*, page 159.

DEFINITIONS

9. Evangelism—the work of traveling from place to place to preach the good news of Jesus Christ.

10. meekness—having a humble (not proud) heart; not being proud.