

The Holy Spirit- Study 1

The Holy Spirit - Introduction

Welcome everybody.

This is the first of a 10-part series of studies on the Holy Spirit. I am excited as we start this journey together. You may have studied the Holy Spirit before. There may not be a scripture in these sessions that you've not heard before. But God has times and appointed seasons and I believe that this is a significant time for us. God wants to move in this place, God wants to move in our lives, God wants to move in this town. I believe that God wants us to have a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit in our lives but most importantly of all a deeper experience the Holy Spirit in our lives. I would encourage you therefore as we continue these studies to seek Him earnestly and ask Him for a greater outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon your life and the lives of people in this town.

On Sunday morning I shared two questions with you. The first was why did Jesus come? I'm sure that we can think of many answers to that question. To point people to the Father, to teach us the right way to live, to defeat evil, to redeem the world. The other question was this: Why did He leave?

You see Jesus' presence on the earth had such a dramatic effect that it wouldn't make sense for The Father to draw Him away unless there was an important reason. And there was. Jesus explained to His disciples why it was so necessary for Him to depart.

John 16:7

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

It was for our good that He departed. Jesus made way for the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to come to us. In His incarnate form Jesus could only minister in one place at a time. Remember the men who beat a path to bring the cripple to Jesus' side? They even made a hole in the roof of the house to get him there – and it wasn't even their house. We are living in a time where God in the form of the Holy Spirit is available wherever you are, to all who believe, all of the time, in all of His fullness. This is really great news. But I still believe that God wants us to have the same passion and determination for God's presence as those men did that day. I know this because ahead of this series of studies on the Holy Spirit I asked God to give me a scripture which would form the basis of them. He gave me this one:

Matthew 7:7,8

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

This got me really excited because it showed me God's intention for this series of studies, not for us to gain head knowledge but to receive more of Him in our lives. God is calling for us to ask, to seek and to knock. To press in, to hunger and thirst for more of Him. The door Jesus speaks of is not a literal door but He is using a metaphor. A door takes you from one place into another. People understand that. The Tabernacle of Moses had three doorways or entrances. One led you into the outer courtyard where you could offer your sacrifices. The next led into the Holy Place where incense was offered which the Bible relates to in places as the prayers of the saints. The third door led into the Holiest Place where intimacy with God is experienced. The tabernacle is a picture of the levels of intimacy that we can experience with God and He would have us seek to draw closer to Him. To experience everything that He has for us. The fullness of Himself. The fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The overarching goal of these times together is not primarily to learn something new but to experience something new. We must allow God to help us to take the scriptures off the pages of the Bible and allow us to live them in our lives. The Bible was never written to be a theoretical journal but a practical manual to show us the way to live in the fullness of what He has for us. We are called to be living epistles and my hope is that over the next few weeks we shall live more in the Spirit than we've ever done before. This is not a self-centred goal. If we have a greater experience of God in our lives then our walk will be transformed and we will bear a greater witness of Him to others. As we are transformed by the Spirit so others will be.

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The Person of the Holy Spirit

In this first session we shall be looking at the person of the Holy Spirit and His divine nature. Let's go back to Jesus' words in John 16:7 for a moment.

John 16:7

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

There is the belief among some sects and religions that the Holy Spirit rather than being a person is a thing, an essence or some sort of force or substance that has power, but not a person. The Holy Spirit is not an 'it' but a 'He'. Jesus clearly refers to Him as such in this verse.

This, however, is my favourite scripture for demonstrating unequivocally that the Holy Spirit is a person:

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The personal pronoun 'he' is used no less than 6 times in this one verse. I think God is making a clear point, don't you? There are countless other examples of scriptures referring to the Holy Spirit as a person and I would encourage you to look some up for yourselves.

The Scriptures show clearly that the Holy Spirit possesses all of the attributes of a person. He has life, a mind and a will, he has thought and understanding, He possesses speech, He has authority, He directs and instructs, He teaches, He loves, He is obeyed and He can be grieved. Let's briefly look at some of these.

He possesses life.

Romans 8:1,2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Here Paul shows us that the Holy Spirit doesn't only possess life, but He is life giving. He's not only alive, He's life itself in the same way that Jesus is the author of life. This is why we need to seek a greater presence of Him in our lives. Jesus put it like this: I have come to give you life to the full, in all of its fullness. This we can have by experiencing a greater measure of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit has a mind.

Romans 8:26,27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

The Holy Spirit not only has a mind, but He knows and understands what is the very best for us and works to get us there. And what is the very best for us? The will of God. As we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives we will find our lives lining fully up with God's will because He works in complete unity with the Father.

1 Corinthians 2:10,11

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit has a will and makes decisions.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

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Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines[wills].

The Holy Spirit loves.

Romans 15:30

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

If you want to bring your children to the Lord, a spouse, friend or neighbour, then love them with the love of God. How do we do that? Open your heart up to God's Spirit and He will fill you with His love. It's a love that can't be manufactured, copied or mimicked. It's substance, it's life changing, it's a love that breaks the yoke off the back of those who experience it. Faith and hope for your loved ones is key of course, but the greatest ingredient is love and the Holy Spirit wants you to experience it fully.

The Holy Spirit speaks, directs and teaches.

John 14:26

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Have you ever been struggling to understand a portion of Scripture and then the Holy Spirit gives you understanding of it? And then there are those times when a verse just seems to jump out at you because He quickens it to you. When we read the Scriptures we should always ask Him to help us make sense of them. He is our guide and teacher. He transforms words on a page into life giving, life changing truths.

Now any teacher will tell you that the worst pupils are the ones that think they know best and don't follow the teacher's advice. The best pupils are those that obey the teacher's instructions. There is a Biblical principle that if you want to have authority in your life you must come under authority. To live life to the full therefore as God would want us to experience it, we must submit to God's authority and to the instructions of His Holy Spirit.

Peter did this when God was showing him that the gospel was being made available to all, both Jew and Gentile.

Acts 10:19-21

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.'

Peter went...

I love the simplicity of those two words. The Spirit spoke and Peter went. Not everything in life is simple I know. But we can be guilty at times of complicating things too. When you've heard God's Spirit clearly, act upon it. You'll be so blessed by doing so.

Revelation 2:17

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

We must incline an ear to the Spirit. We must seek His leadership and direction in our lives and obey. Not seeking His direction would be like driving around in a car which has satnav when we don't know the way and not switching it on. Not obeying the Spirit would be like having the satnav on but not following its directions. We must seek Him, listen to Him and obey Him.

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Having raised the matter of obedience we must understand the the Holy Spirit carries the full authority of God. And that is because the Holy Spirit is fully divine, fully God and part of what Christians refer to as the Trinity, God: three in one.

We've already looked at a verse tonight that describes the relationships within the Trinity:

John 15:26

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me (Christ).

The Holy Spirit isn't god-like but fully in every sense God, just as the Father is and just as the Son is.

Acts 5:1-4

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.'

Exodus 31:1-4

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.

Job 32:8

But it is the Spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour...

I'll stop there, just where Jesus did!

The Father, Jesus His Son and the Spirit are each fully God and are each united together as the one true God. This is the meaning of the term Trinity – tri-unity, three united as one.

The concept of the three in one God is of course not an easy one to grasp. This side of eternity we will never be able to grasp it fully but one day we will have a better understanding. Even though it is currently beyond fully comprehending, there are different ways of visualising it that can give us a better understanding of it. For example, if you think of an equilateral triangle with its three equal angles, imagine now that each of these angles represents one part of the Trinity. Whilst it is true to say that each of the three angles have a uniqueness about it, it is also true that if we started to colour in one of these angles then we would eventually end up colouring in the other ones as well, until the whole triangle was filled. There isn't a place where one angle ends and the others start you see. They each run into each other.

Another way of imagining the Trinity is to look at a cuboid. Imagine that three of the faces now represent the three persons of the Trinity. The faces may be different in dimensions but whichever face we are looking at we are nevertheless seeing the same three-dimensional shape, just from a different perspective.

One final idea is to think of who I am to Sandra, my wife, to Matthew and Sam, my sons, and to the pupils that I teach Maths to at school. To the one I am a husband. To another I am a father. To another still I am a teacher. Yet I am one person.

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Although these ways of visualising the Trinity may give a little insight, they are of course limited models which cannot even come close to describing the complexity of God and shouldn't presume to do so. But I have found them helpful over the years in tackling the idea of the Trinity with new converts and also with non-Christians.

The Holy Spirit then, being fully God, of course must hold all of the attributes of God:

He is omniscient

1 Corinthians 2:10,11

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

He is omnipresent

Psalm 139:7,8

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

He is omnipotent

Psalm 104:27,30

All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

And He is eternal

Hebrews 9:13,14

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

In closing.

John the Baptist said to Jesus, I must become less, you must become more. If we want to see God's full will at work in our lives we must hunger after more of Him and less of ourselves. We must be willing to submit ourselves to God and the leading of his Holy Spirit. God promises us, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. This week can I encourage you to spend time seeking more of Him. Ask, seek, knock. Hunger and thirst even. I believe this is a season for us to seek in a deeper way than we may ever have sought God before. Ask for the fullness of His Spirit. Be like the persistent widow. God's promise to us is that when we do that, a door of new opportunity will open and even the floodgates of heaven will open.

Thank you.