



GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

Reading: Mark 1

The Spirit of God

When we look up at the night sky and see the moon and the stars, we begin to realise the incredible size of the universe. God created the universe by His Spirit:

*“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3).*

Jeremiah tells us that God's great power was at work when He created the earth:

“It is I (God) who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth” (Jeremiah 27:5).

Psalms 33 describes creation in this way:

*“**By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm**” (Psalm 33:6-9).*

God only had to speak the words and His will was carried out by the power of His Spirit. When God **said**, “Let there be light”, His words had enormous power and authority. This is what Psalm 33 tells us when it says: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host ...”

By His Spirit, God keeps creation alive. He did not create the world and then abandon it:

*“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since **he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything... ‘In him we live and move and have our being’**” (Acts 17:24-28).*

“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4).

See also Psalm 104:10-15, 27-30 and Isaiah 42:5.

God is everywhere present by His Spirit and knows all things

Despite the enormous size of the universe, God is everywhere:

*“Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not **fill heaven and earth**? declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:24).*

Not only is God everywhere, He also knows all things. He knows everything about us, even our thoughts. We cannot hide anything from Him:

*“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; **you discern my thoughts** from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and **are acquainted with all my ways**. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether ... **Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?** If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, (the grave) you are there!” (Psalm 139:1-3,7,8).*

How is God able to “fill heaven and earth” and know everything? It is by His Spirit. This is why David says in Psalm 139, “Where shall I go from your Spirit?”

God used His Spirit to communicate with people

In Bible times God used His Spirit to direct the minds of the prophets to speak His message:





*“They (the people) made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the **LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit** through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 7:12).*

The Spirit of God is His power through which He makes and supports all things. Through it He is everywhere present and knows all things. God used His Spirit in Bible times to reveal His plan and purpose to mankind, and He uses it to carry out His purpose. Everything God does is by His Spirit.

Inspiration and the Spirit of God

God also used His Spirit to direct the minds of those who wrote the Bible, so that they wrote His words. This is known as inspiration. Through inspiration, God is the true author of the Bible:

*“... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**” (2 Peter 1:20,21).*



This passage is not just about men foretelling the future. In the Bible, the word ‘prophecy’ means revealing God’s words, whether about the past, present or future.

At least 35 writers, living in many different places, wrote the words of the Bible. It was written over a period of about 1,600 years. If God had not inspired its writing, the Bible would be a complete mixture of ideas and standards. Instead, the same message runs throughout the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This shows that the Bible is God’s Word.

The Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ

God’s Spirit is sometimes called the Holy Spirit. Most references to the Holy Spirit are in the New Testament. The word ‘holy’ means ‘separate’ or ‘set apart’, with the idea of God’s Spirit being totally different from the wickedness of mankind. Older translations of the Bible use ‘Holy Ghost’ instead of ‘Holy Spirit’. ‘Ghost’ is the old word for ‘spirit’ but can be misunderstood today. The Holy Spirit is the power of God by which He works out His purpose concerning salvation – so people can eventually be holy like Him.

The first New Testament use of the phrase ‘Holy Spirit’ tells us that it brought about the birth of Jesus. The virgin Mary was *“found to be with child from the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 1:18).

At his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was given the Holy Spirit without measure (without any limit, John 3:34). Through His Spirit, God gave limited abilities (e.g. the ability to do miracles) to selected people in Bible times; but no other person ever received the Holy Spirit totally as Jesus did. Jesus never used the Holy Spirit to do his own will, but he always used it in the purpose of God (Acts 2:22). He performed miracles to help his preaching. They were a sign that he was God’s Son. They showed that God was working through him and that he was teaching God’s ways (Isaiah 61:1,2).

God used His Spirit to raise His Son from the dead and exalt him (Ephesians 1:19-22).

The apostles were given the gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Lord Jesus promised his apostles that they would be given the Holy Spirit after he had gone into heaven. He told them to stay in Jerusalem and *“wait for the promise of the Father”* for they would *“be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”* (Acts 1:4,5).

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), about ten days after Jesus had ascended to heaven. We read how the Holy Spirit came with a sound *“like a mighty rushing wind”*, shaking the house where the apostles were gathered together. Tongues of fire were seen over each one of them. This was a sign that the Holy Spirit had been given to them. They then had special abilities including the power to do miracles and





speak in tongues (different languages). These special abilities are sometimes called the “*gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (Hebrews 2:4).

The Lord Jesus had instructed his apostles to continue his work of preaching after he had gone to heaven. They needed the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help them do this. For example, they needed to remember what Jesus had said and done during his ministry, so that they could teach others. Jesus said to his apostles,

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:25,26).

Here the Holy Spirit is called the Helper (‘Comforter’ in some versions). The original Greek word means ‘one called alongside to help’. The Holy Spirit provided the help that the apostles needed.

Why did Jesus sometimes speak of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person?

When the quotation above says “*he will teach you all things*”, it sounds as if the Holy Spirit is a person. Why, then, does Jesus sometimes speak of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person? The same sort of language is used in Romans 9:17:

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you ...’ ”

Clearly the Scripture is not a person and cannot “say” anything. It is God’s words that are recorded. Luke 11:49 uses similar language:

“Therefore also the Wisdom of God said ...”

Similarly, Psalm 65:13 says:

“... the valleys deck themselves with corn, they shout and sing together for joy”.

The valleys are not literally shouting and singing. This is the Psalmist’s poetical way of describing a beautiful scene. Proverbs 3:13-19 is another example – it talks about wisdom as if it were a beautiful and righteous woman. The Bible uses this sort of language to show how real something is. So when Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit in this way, he is just showing us what a very real thing the Spirit of God is.

The Holy Spirit is not separate from God

Some people wrongly believe that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God. They use the phrases ‘God the Holy Spirit’ and ‘God the Holy Ghost’ which never occur in the Bible. God’s Spirit is not a separate being from Him – it is part of God Himself, just as our strength is part of us. How can we separate God from His great power, His wisdom, His understanding? They are not separate persons for we read in Jeremiah 51:15:

“It is he (God) who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

If the Holy Spirit were a separate person from God, then the Holy Spirit (and not God Himself) would be the father of Jesus (Matthew 1:18). This is clearly not the case.

God’s Spirit and us

To understand God’s Spirit is to try to understand God Himself, and this we can never completely do with our mortal minds. God’s Spirit is more than just power. Nehemiah 9:20 says that God gave His “*good spirit*” to instruct the people of Israel, referring to the help given to Moses. God’s Spirit is full of goodness, and the way He uses it shows that He is a merciful and gracious God. This is the type of spirit, or attitude, people should have in their lives.

The gifts (special abilities) of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed and no-one has them today (there is more about this in the next lesson). Today, God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, which was written through the Holy Spirit. When we read the Word of God and allow it to influence and guide everything we do, it gradually changes us to be more Christ-like. In this way God’s Word can be said to be at work within us. The apostle Paul said to the believers at Thessalonica:





*"... when you received the word of God ... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, **the word of God, which is at work in you believers**" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).*

The following verses show how important God's Word is if we want to be born of the Spirit (start a new life serving God):

*"... **you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God**" (1 Peter 1:23).*

*"Of his own will he **brought us forth by the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).*

We are by nature sinful. The apostle Paul in Romans 8:5-7 says:

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God."

Paul uses the term 'flesh' to describe man's thinking; he uses the term 'spirit' to describe the things of God which are revealed to us in the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We need to overcome the flesh (our human evil thinking) and replace it with spiritual, godly thinking. The working of the Bible in our lives changes us to become spiritually minded people. In this way the Spirit of God can be in us. Paul says to the baptized believers,

"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 8:9,10).

Finally, we must remember that God is everywhere present by His Spirit and knows all about us. We cannot hide our sins from Him:

*"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account**" (Hebrews 4:12,13).*

Summary

1. The Spirit of God is His power through which He makes and supports all things. By it He created the universe and keeps creation alive.
2. By His Spirit, God is everywhere present and knows all things.
3. Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit. He was given the Spirit without limit.
4. The apostles were given the gifts (special abilities) of the Holy Spirit, including the power to do miracles and speak in different languages.
5. In Bible times God used His Spirit to communicate with people.
6. Today, God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, which was written through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses to learn: Psalm 139:1,2

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

Verses to read: Psalm 104; John 14; Acts 10:34-43; Galatians 5:16-26

