

# The Doctrine of the Trinity



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity: The Spirit

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March 2022

### Who is God the Spirit?

Of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is typically the last one mentioned. Sometimes it is even thought of as the least of the three Persons. But the Holy Spirit is in no way inferior to the Father or the Son, since they are all one God. The Spirit is mentioned in both the Old and the New Testament with the Hebrew word רִיחַ (ruach) and the Greek word πνεῦμα (pneuma). Both of these mean breath, wind, or spirit. These definitions can be helpful in better understanding and remembering the work of the Holy Spirit: Sanctification.

### Is the Spirit a separate Person?

Some believe that the Spirit, described as the *breath* of God, is not a distinct person, but a thing that the Father and the Son use. But Scripture describes in many places how the Holy Spirit is unique from the Father and the Son in carrying out its specific work. While being the least talked about of the Trinity in Scripture, the knowledge of the Spirit remains necessary to our faith, and our worship of the Spirit remains a privilege and a blessing.

- Read Genesis 1:2, 2 Samuel 23:2, and Ezekiel 36:27. What activities is the Spirit involved with or is carrying out in these verses?
- The Bible ascribes divine attributes to the Spirit, testifying that it is, indeed, God. Determine which attributes the Spirit is described as having from the following passages: Acts 5:3-4, Hebrews 9:14, and Psalm 139:7-8.

## What is Sanctification?

To *sanctify* means to *make holy* or *set apart*. The Holy Spirit does its work sight unseen within the heart, creating and sustaining faith. His tools for this work are the Means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He is the One who turns sinful hearts to repentance and guides those hearts to accomplish God-pleasing works as a result of faith and in accordance with the Word. The Spirit is the One who moves us from the unbelieving world and sets us in Christ's kingdom of faith, while also enabling us to live in the world as His messengers.

- One of the ways the Spirit works in us is through the sacrament of baptism. Read Titus 3:5. Why is it important to know that our baptism is a work of the Spirit, and not of man?
- Another way in which the Spirit works in and through us is evangelism. Read Matthew 10:19-20. What comfort do these verses offer us in our personal ministry?

- A third way the Spirit works in us is through prayer. Read Romans 8:26. What confidence can we have in our prayer life because of this?

## What is the *Filioque*?

The *filioque* has been a point of debate for centuries among Christians. It is a Latin word which means *and the Son*. In the 9th century, the Eastern church (Constantinople) and the Western church (Rome) disagreed about whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son. This ended up being the leading doctrinal cause for the Great Schism in 1054.

- When we say in the Nicene Creed that the Spirit *proceeds from the Father and the Son*, we are borrowing words from John 15:26. Here we read that Jesus sends the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father. But whose Spirit is it also described as? Read Acts 16:16 and Galatians 4:6.
- Not only that, but the unity of the Father and the Son further informs us where the Spirit comes from. Read John 5:19 and John 10:30. How do these verses also teach that the Spirit proceeds from the Son?

## What is the sin against the Holy Spirit?

One teaching of Scripture that has been especially troubling to not a few faithful Christians over the centuries is the sin against the Holy Spirit. This

warrants further study so that we can properly understand what Scripture describes about this sin, and how we can apply this teaching to our own lives.

- Read Matthew 12:31 and Mark 3:29. What is so frightening about what is described here?
- Read 1 Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:15, and Acts 7:51. What is the unpardonable sin? How do we reconcile this with verses like 1 John 1:9?

## **How should we pray to the Spirit?**

As mentioned previously, the work of the Spirit is the work he conducts in our hearts to create and sustain our faith. This includes strengthening us to live out our faith as God's children in thought, word, and deed.

- With this knowledge, what are some prayers of thanks that we can render the Spirit specifically?
- What are some of the things we ought to pray for the Spirit's help with?
- What if while we're praying, we forget something? (see Romans 8:26 again)