

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 2 The Personality of the Holy Spirit

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Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 2

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

If we were asked to state in a comprehensive form what constitutes (according to our views of Scripture) the blessedness of the Lord's people on earth, after His work of grace is begun in their souls, we would not hesitate to say that it must be wholly made up of the personal knowledge of and communion with the glorious Trinity in their Persons in the Godhead—for as the church is chosen to be everlastingly holy and everlastingly happy, in uninterrupted communion with God in glory when this life is ended, the anticipation of it now by faith must form the purest source of all present joy. But this communion with God in the Trinity of His Persons cannot be enjoyed without a clear apprehension of Him. We must know under Divine teaching God in the Trinity of His Persons, and we must also know from the same source the special and personal acts of grace by which each glorious Person in the Godhead has condescended to make Himself known unto His people before we can be said to personally enjoy communion with each and all. We offer no apology, then, for devoting a separate chapter to the consideration of the personality of the Holy Spirit, for unless we have a right conception of His glorious being, it is impossible that we should entertain right thoughts about Him, and therefore impossible for us to render to Him that homage, love, confidence, and submission, which are His due. To the Christian who is given to realize that he owes to the personal operations of the Spirit every Divine influence exercised upon him from the first moment of regeneration until the final consummation in glory, it cannot be a matter of little importance for him to aspire after the fullest apprehension of Him that his finite faculties are capable of—yea, he will consider no effort too great to obtain spiritual views of Him to whose Divine grace and power the effectual means of his salvation through Christ are to be ascribed. To those who are strangers to the operations of the blessed Spirit in the heart, the theme of this chapter is likely to be a matter of unconcern, and its details wearisome. Figurative or Literal Personality Some of our readers may be surprised to hear that there are men professing to be Christians who flatly deny the personality of the Spirit. We will not sully these pages by transcribing their blasphemies, but we will mention one detail to which appeal is made by the spiritual seducers, because some of our friends have possibly experienced a difficulty with it. In the second chapter of Acts the Holy Spirit was said to be "poured out" (v. 18) and "shed abroad" (v. 33). How could such terms be used of a Person? Very easily: that language is figurative, and not literal; literal it cannot be for that which is spiritual

is incapable of being materially "poured out." The figure is easily interpreted: as water "poured out" descends, so the Spirit has come from Heaven to earth; as a "pouring" rain is a heavy one, so the Spirit is freely given in the plentitude of His gifts. Aspects of Personality Having cleared up, we trust, what has given difficulty to some, the way is now open for us to set forth some of the positive evidence. Let us begin by pointing out that a "person" is an intelligent and voluntary entity, of whom personal properties may be truly predicated. A "person" is a living entity, endowed with understanding and will, being an intelligent and willing agent. Such is the Holy Spirit: all the elements which constitute personality are ascribed to and found in Him. "As the Father hath life in Himself, and the Son has life in Himself, so has the Holy Spirit: since He is the Author of natural and spiritual life to men, which He could not be unless He had life in Himself; and if He has life in Himself, He must subsist in Himself" (John Gill). 1. Personal properties are predicated of the Spirit. He is endowed with understanding or wisdom, which is the first inseparable property of an intelligent agent: "the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Now to "search" is an act of understanding, and the Spirit is said to "search" because He "knoweth" (v. 11). He is endowed with will, which is the most eminently distinguishing property of a person: "All these things worketh that one and selfsame Spirit, dividing unto every man as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11)—how utterly meaningless would be such language were the Spirit only an influence or energy! He loves: "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit" (Rom. 15:30)—how absurd would it be to speak of the "love of the Spirit" if the Spirit were nothing but an impersonal breath or abstract quality! 2. Passive personal properties are ascribed to the Holy Spirit: that is to say, He is the Object of such actions of men as none but a person can be. "Ye agree together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" (Acts 5:9)—rightly did John Owen say, "How can a quality, an accident, an emanation from God be tempted? None can possibly be so but he that hath an understanding to consider what is proposed unto him, and a will to determine upon the proposals made." In like manner, Ananias is said to, "lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3)—none can lie unto any other but such a one as is capable of hearing and receiving a testimony. In Ephesians 4:30 we are bidden not to grieve the Holy Spirit"—how senseless would it be to talk about "grieving" an abstraction, like the law of gravity. Hebrews 10:29 warns us that He may be "done despite unto." 3. Personal actions are attributed to Him. He speaks: "The Spirit speaketh expressly" (1 Tim. 4:1); "he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7). He teaches: "The Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12); "He shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). He commands or exercises authority: a striking proof of this is found in Acts 13:2, "The Holy Spirit said, Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"—how utterly misleading would such language be if the Spirit were not a real person! He intercedes: "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:26)—as the intercession of Christ proves Him to be a person, and a distinct one from the Father, unto whom He intercedes, so the intercession of the Spirit equally proves His personality, even His distinct personality. 4. Personal characters are ascribed to Him. Four times over the Lord Jesus referred to the Spirit as "The Comforter," and not merely as "comfort"; inanimate things, such as clothes, may give us comfort, but only a living person can be a "comforter." Again, He is the Witness: "The Holy Spirit also is a witness to us" (Heb. 10:15); "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16)—the term is a forensic one, denoting the supplying of valid evidence or legal proof; obviously, only an intelligent agent is capable of discharging such an office. He is Justifier and Sanctifier: "But ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 6:11). 5. Personal pronouns are used about Him. The word "pneuma" in the Greek, like "spirit" in the English, is neuter, nevertheless the Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of in the masculine gender: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things" (John 14:26)—the personal pronoun could not, without

violating grammar and propriety, be applied to any other but a person. Referring again to Him, Christ said, "If I depart, I will send Him unto you" (John 16:7)—there is no other alternative than to regard the Holy Spirit as a Person, or to be guilty of the frightful blasphemy of affirming that the Savior employed language which could only mislead His Apostles and bring them into fearful error. "I will pray the Father that he shall give another Comforter" (John 14:16)—no comparison would be possible between Christ (a Person) and an abstract influence. Borrowing the language of the revered J. Owen, we may surely say, "By all these testimonies we have fully confirmed what was designed to be proved by them, namely, that the Holy Spirit is not a quality, as some speak, residing in the Divine nature; not a mere emanation of virtue and power from God; not the acting of the power of God in and unto our sanctification, but a holy, intelligent subsistent, or Person." May it please the Eternal Spirit to add His blessings to the above, apply the same to our hearts, and make His adorable Person more real and precious to each of us. Amen.

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