

Person of the Holy Spirit, II

In this lecture for the class “Spirit, Church, & Last Things,” we are studying the person of God the Holy Spirit in preparation for examining some of His ministries. We have said that God the Holy Spirit is a person and now we add that He is a divine person. The Holy Spirit is God. Not only does holy Scripture present the Holy Spirit as a person, but it presents Him as a divine person. He is different from, yet equal to, the Father and the Son. Let us examine four biblical evidences that the Spirit is deity. A quick preview of these points might be helpful. First, the Holy Spirit is used interchangeably in Scripture with God. Secondly, He has divine qualities. Third, He does divine works. And fourth, He is associated with the other two persons of the Godhead in ways in which only God could be associated.

The Holy Spirit is used interchangeably with God. This is the notion of substitution. The biblical writers substitute the Holy Spirit for God. One place for seeing this is in Acts 5 where we learn of Ananias and Sapphira and God’s temporal judgment upon them. I do not know about their eternal destiny, but surely the Lord was very displeased with them and took their lives away. Acts 5:3 says that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God: “You have not lied to men,” Peter said, “but you have lied to God.” The implication is that the Holy Spirit is God Himself. There is an interchangeability in the reference to either.

The Holy Spirit also has divine qualities. The Spirit possesses qualities that only God has. One example that will suffice is knowledge. We used knowledge to prove that the Spirit is a person rather than a force because He teaches and brings to remembrance and so forth. But now we are showing that the Spirit not only has knowledge, but also knowledge that only God has access to. We see this in 1 Corinthians 2 where Paul says, “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among human beings knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him. In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” If you do not reveal your inmost thoughts even to your spouse or to your closest friends, they will never know those thoughts. In the same way, God’s inmost thoughts are known only to the Spirit of God. He has access to those things. The implication is irresistible. The Spirit has knowledge that only God possesses. No man or angel has access to that knowledge. Only God Himself is privy to it.

So the Spirit is God because the Holy Spirit is used interchangeably with God in Scripture. And He is God because He has qualities ascribed to Him that only are ascribed to God. Third, the Spirit does works that only God does. The Spirit is involved in the work of creation and the work of the giving of Scripture. But the most important proof that the Spirit is deity is that He does the work of salvation. The Spirit in Scripture is the servant of the Father and the Son. So not as much attention is directed to Him and it is much easier to show, for example, the deity of Christ than the deity of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we have enough information to conclude that the Spirit is God as well.

The chief proof that the Holy Spirit is God is that He does the work of salvation. Salvation is expressed in many different ways in Scripture. Let me just work with two of them, regeneration and resurrection. Titus 3:4 speaks of the saving grace of God: “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” Notice that the washing of rebirth and renewal is ascribed to God the Holy Spirit. He causes us to be reborn, to be born again, and to be renewed. That is the work of regeneration. If we ask who does the work of regeneration in the Bible, there is no doubt. Angels do not regenerate anybody. Human beings share the Gospel, but we cannot create new life inside of another person. That

is the work of God Himself. And since the Holy Spirit does that work of rebirth and renewal, He must be God.

One more example is from Romans 8:11: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead”—a reference to God the Father—“will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you.” The Father, who raised Christ from the dead, will give life to your mortal bodies. And He will do it through His Spirit. This is not talking about regeneration in this life. It is talking about the renewal of our bodies, or giving life to our bodies through the Spirit in the next life. The resurrection of the dead is here ascribed to God the Holy Spirit. Men and angels do not raise the dead in this sense. Only God himself does it. What is the conclusion? Since the Spirit does the works of God, the Spirit is God.

Our last proof of the deity of the Holy Spirit is that Scripture associates Him with the Father and the Son in ways in which only God could be associated. How does the baptismal formula work? Does Jesus tell us to baptize people “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the force”? No, it does not work that way. You cannot make that third person a mere human being or an angel or an impersonal force. We baptize in the name of the Trinity, in the name of God Himself. And those three slots, Father, Son, and Spirit, are plainly occupied by persons of the Godhead. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul states that you were not baptized in the name of Paul. He is contrasting God with human ministers of God. Even an apostle cannot occupy that close association with God. You are baptized in the name of God Himself. Or consider these possible changes to the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the force be with you all.” No, that cannot be right. Or, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the angel be with you all.” No, that is not any better. We might try “the fellowship of the apostle Paul.” There is such a thing as people having fellowship with people, but that is not the context. This is God bestowing blessings on people. What kind of a benediction would that be for a pastor to give? No, Paul does not give a benediction in the name of some human being or an angel or a force. He gives the benediction in the name of the triune God. Thus in our brief summary of the person of the Holy Spirit we made two points. He is a person and not merely a force, and He is God—He is a divine person.

Let us move to a study of the ministries of God the Holy Spirit. We have done enough foundational work with His identity that we are now ready to study what He does. The most important thing the Spirit does has nothing to do with producing fruit in the people of God, as important as that is, nor does it have to do with spiritual gifts, as important as they are. Rather, the most important thing the Spirit does is apply salvation to the people of God. If we do not see this, then we distort the Christian faith because we have got the fruit or the gifts occupying a place they should not. They are important and we are going to study them, but the Holy Spirit’s application of salvation is primary.

Let me put salvation in a broad context for you, which you might find helpful. If we look at salvation in broadest terms, we can get the parts in relation to each other perhaps better than we have in the past. There is salvation planned, accomplished, applied, and consummated. We call salvation planned predestination or election. The Bible does not give us every detail there that we might want to know, but it teaches the doctrine of predestination. Regarding salvation planned, who is the major operator? Which person of the Godhead is primarily involved? Election is primarily the work of God the Father. Since God is a Trinity, a work of one person of the Godhead is a work of the entire Trinity. So election is the work of the Trinity, the plan of the Trinity. But specifically it is the planning of God the Father, yet done in concert with the Son and Holy Spirit. According to Ephesians 1, the planning happened before the creation of the world.

Who then is the major player in the accomplishment of salvation? That is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This accomplishment did not happen before the creation of the world. It was planned then, so that Revelation can speak of Him as the Lamb slain before the creation of the world. It does not mean, of course, that He died then literally. He could not die before he became a human being and that happened in the first century and that is when salvation was wrought, when it was accomplished, when it was done. We were not saved in eternity. We did not even exist yet. But God planned to save us. You could even say our salvation was rendered certain by God. After all, He is God and, unlike us, His plans come to pass. So God, especially the Father, planned salvation. But the Son died on the cross, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Since God is a Trinity, however, Scripture can speak of the other persons being involved. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” And Hebrews 9 speaks of the Son of God offering Himself up by the eternal Spirit, which I believe is a reference to God the Holy Spirit.

Salvation was planned by the Trinity, and especially the Father before the creation. It was accomplished by the Son of God on the cross and in His resurrection from the dead in the first century. Who applies salvation to us? The Trinity does, of course, because you cannot separate God. But especially it is the work of God the Holy Spirit. And that will be the focus of our discussion. Just for the sake of completeness, salvation consummated is the resurrection of the dead and all that follows. Our final glorification, our complete sanctification and so forth, is the work of the trinity and it is also yet to come. Does that help you to see those things in a broad spectrum like that? I think it really helps to pull things together for me.

We are interested in the third aspect, the application of salvation. But to summarize the bigger picture once again, I am saying the Father chose you before the creation of the world. The Son did that which was necessary in order to save you in the first century, but you were still not saved then. You did not even exist then. You were saved when the Spirit came and applied salvation to you. Yet you remain to be saved in the final and full sense until you are raised from the dead and made completely without sin. Then you will be able to look at Christ’s glory and be transformed.

How does the Bible describe the application of salvation? It uses a number of different ways of talking about it. The actual touching of our lives by God’s grace so that in time and space we come to know the Lord is through union with Christ, regeneration, conversion, assurance of adoption, justification, sanctification, and preservation.

The Holy Spirit applies salvation to the people of God. He unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Union with Christ is a neglected topic indeed. The Bible says that before we knew Christ we were separated from God. We were separated from Christ without God and without hope in the world, according to Ephesians chapters 2 and 4. When God saved us, He spiritually joined us to His Son. He united us spiritually to His Son, forming a bond between us. The Bible speaks of this in so many ways. When it says “in Christ” it speaks of this. It says we died with Him, were buried with Him, were raised with Him, ascended with Him, and sat down at God’s right hand with Him. It even uses the language of the second coming in Romans 8 and Colossians 3 to speak of our final salvation. Technically speaking, we are not having any second coming. But since Jesus will, and we are so spiritually united to Him, His second coming will be the revelation of our true identity as well.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts.” He is talking there about the human body, but He goes on in the next verse to say, “And though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” Here the Spirit is the one

who incorporates us into the body of Christ. This metaphor of body and the members of the body in interrelation to one another in the church is an organic picture. We are joined to the head, Christ, and to the other members of Christ as people by the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit joins us to Christ so that Romans 8:9 can say, "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ," because the Spirit is the one who joins us to the Lord Jesus." If you ask me what is the most important thing God the Holy Spirit does for us I would tell you it is that He saves us by actually applying to us the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and in His resurrection from the grave.

The Spirit applies that work of Christ to our lives. He brings God's grace to us. This is expressed in several different ways. He unites us spiritually to the Son of God so that we are no longer separate from Him. We are no longer without God and without hope in the world, but now we are joined to Him so that the eternal life which is His becomes ours. The forgiveness of sins which is found in Him alone becomes our forgiveness.

The Spirit not only does that, but he also applies salvation to us under this metaphor of regeneration. John 3:8 speaks of this when Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Jesus basically shows Nicodemus he is a novice when it comes to God's school and the knowledge of God, even though he is supposed to be the teacher of Israel. Nicodemus asks this foolish question in John 3:4: "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus lets him flounder on purpose in order to give him what he needs, like Jesus does in the next chapter when He deals with the Samaritan woman and gives her what she needs. John is showing the truth of verse 25 of chapter 2. "Jesus did not need man's testimony about man for He knew what was in a man." Nicodemus should have understood from Ezekiel chapter 36 what it means to be born of water and of the Spirit. Ezekiel prophesied God would pour out His Spirit in the last days. The water speaks of cleansing. The Spirit speaks of God Himself and the realm of God. In verse 8 Jesus uses some wordplay concerning "the wind." The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*, which means "breath," "wind," or "Spirit." Jesus says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the wind." That is, the holy wind of God, the Spirit. It is a play on words.

Jesus likens the Holy Spirit to the wind. We cannot see the wind. And we cannot predict its movements. In that sense the wind is sovereign; in that it is beyond our control. All we can see is the effects of the wind. You can see the leaves move or rustle on the tree. Or in a stronger wind they move more violently and you know the wind has been through there. You know it because of its effects. Likewise, the Spirit Himself is invisible and His work is unpredictable, but you know Him because of His effects. In this context He gives life to those who are spiritually dead. And whereas before there was spiritual death, where people were devoid of the life of God, when the Spirit has blown through there will be life. It should be noted that His customary way is to work through the Gospel. We will get to that under the means of grace when we talk about the Spirit and the Word and God's normal working. Anyway, when the Spirit works through the Word to give new life, there is evidence of His presence and His ministry. So the wind is invisible and unpredictable and only known by its effects. It also says the wind blows wherever it pleases. Not only is the wind unpredictable and only known from its effects, but the wind is also sovereign, so to speak. Jesus is setting up what He wants to say about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sovereign as well. The Holy Wind of God blows wherever He pleases.

I cannot forget the words of a godly pastor who spoke in our chapel. It was a humble message on his part. He shared how he had been in two different churches and in the first one he served the Lord faithfully, as he knew how. He was a sinner and he confessed his sins but he faithfully discharged his ministry. And the church saw modest growth. Praise the Lord for that. Then the Lord definitely directed

him on to another ministry and in that context he did the same basic things he did before. He studied faithfully and preached God's Word in the power of the Spirit. He prayed and they did evangelism and they worshipped the Lord. They were the same things he did before, but this time he said the Lord poured His Holy Spirit out on the church in a way he could not predict, control, understand, or take any credit for. Hundreds of people were added in the Lord over a period of only a few years. His own evaluation was that the Lord did it. It is very curious that when he was faithful in the first pastorate, he was not called or asked to participate in seminars. Then, all of a sudden, the phone calls came along with letters asking if he would please come and tell them his secrets of church renewal. His answer was that he did not have any secrets of church renewal. He just faithfully served the Lord the best that he knew how in both pastorates and this time the Spirit, the holy wind of God, blew with gale force. All the credit went where it belonged, to God Himself who chose to use His ministers in that particular place in a powerful way according to His own will. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us new life. You should credit God the Holy Spirit for the life that you have and the fact that you are alive to God, that you have new life, that you have been brought from death to life—that you have been spiritually resurrected. It was not of your own doing, not of your own intelligence or native spirituality or anything else. You were spiritually dead and God made you alive. It was the work of the Spirit in applying the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus to you.

According to 1 Peter 1:3, it is the Spirit who converts us. There are two ways of looking at conversion in the application of salvation. The Bible speaks both in terms of God's work and our working. Conversion means turning from sin and turning to God. Yet these things, repentance, turning from sin, faith, and turning to God, are gifts of God. They are the human activities and part of human responsibility. We repent. God does not repent. We believe. God does not need to believe. But even the repentance and the faith we exercise are good gifts of our gracious God.

Acts 11 is where Peter recounts to the apostles and brothers what had happened in the household of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. At one point Peter said, "As I began to speak the Holy Spirit came on them"—that is, Cornelius and his family and friends—"as he had come on us at the beginning." That is a reference to Pentecost. There is no doubt that God did this to Cornelius and his family in order to convince Peter that God was saving the Gentiles the same way He had saved Peter and the Jews. Peter continued, "Then I remembered what the Lord had said, 'John baptized you with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift that he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God. When they heard this, they"—that is, the apostles, brothers, elders, and leaders of the church—"had no further objections and praised God saying, 'So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'" Plainly repentance is a gift of God. From the several mentions of the Spirit in these verses, I conclude that it is specifically the Spirit that we are to understand who grants repentance to people who are turning to God. Conversion is a word that is theological shorthand for repentance plus faith. I do not even like to say "repentance plus faith," but rather repentance/faith, or to regard them as two sides of the same coin because the repentance that saves involves trust in Christ. And genuine faith in Christ involves turning from sin. They are two sides of the same coin. They are inseparable.

The Lord also gives faith. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul says, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed.' And no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." You might be thinking that somebody could say those words. And you are right. Someone could say those words and be unsaved. But this is the primitive Christian confession. Compare the idea here to Romans 10:9-10. The meaning is not that nobody could frame those words with his or her lips. The meaning is that no one

can say, “Jesus is Lord,” and mean it apart from the work of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us the ability to make that primitive Christian confession which saves. The Spirit gives us the gift of faith.

So the Spirit applies salvation to us. The Bible uses different pictures to speak of it. The Spirit joins us to the Son of God. He gives us new life. He converts us. These different expressions are wonderful because God could have just said in one sentence, “The Spirit applies salvation to you.” But God does it in at least seven different pictures showing how He works in our lives. If you wonder why there is a multiplicity of ways to talk about it, the answer is best given by Leon Morris in his good book, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. The description of the remedy is manifold and varied because the plight is manifold. That is, we were in sufficient trouble, and our lost-ness is described with different images, so the remedy is as well. We had a number of diseases and we needed many cures. We were separated from Christ, so we desperately needed to be joined to Him. We were spiritually dead according to Ephesians 2, and thanks be to God that He gave us new life. We were unconverted in that it was not natural to repent and believe, but God worked in us and as a result of His work we repented and believed. We were not by nature children of God. We were children of the devil. We were children of wrath, again according to Ephesians 2. And 1 John divides the human race up into two groups: the children of God and the children of the devil. So we were children of the devil and we were in bondage to sin and Satan. We needed God to adopt us if we would be saved, and He did. We were condemned and we needed a Holy God to declare us righteous. We were spiritually filthy, defiled, and unclean by nature. Thanks be to God that He sanctified us. And He continues to sanctify us. And He will yet finally and completely sanctify us. We are prone to wander and God keeps us.

Let me speak a little bit more on adoption. We are talking about the way the Holy Spirit applies salvation to us. Remember I told you slavery, and bondage, was the background to adoption. Galatians 4:3-4 says, “We were in slavery under the basic principles of the world, but when the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. The Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave.” Hold your head up high because here is your identity, children of God. You are a son or a daughter of the living God. And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. God is so good to us. He adopts us into his family, though we were children of Satan and slaves of the Evil One. How does He do it? It is complicated. The Father is behind the scenes planning the whole business. He chose us for adoption. The Son redeems us. Slaves need to be redeemed, to be bought back from their old master. Jesus redeems us. The Spirit is sent by the Father. He is the Spirit of the Son. The whole Trinity is involved in our adoption. The Spirit is sent into our hearts, and the Spirit cries out, “Abba! Father!” “Abba” is the Aramaic word for “Father,” and we now use it to refer to God Himself. Romans 8:15 says it explicitly: “You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.” There is that slavery dimension again. “But you received the Spirit of sonship.” And it is by that Spirit that we cry, “Abba! Father!” This is another way of saying that faith is a gift of God. It is by virtue of the Spirit’s work in our lives that we are able to call God our Father, and it is really so. We can call God “Father,” and it is reality. Furthermore, the Spirit not only works in our initial confession of faith, but He also works in a continuing way inside of us to give us assurance. Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

God is so good. He assures us in at least three different ways. Chiefly, in His word He gives us assurance. We read that God saves us and keeps us and it puts our hearts at rest. So primarily, outside of us, in the Word God gives us assurance. Also, in our lives, God makes changes and as we see Him at work in our lives; as we see the fruit of the Spirit, we have assurance that way as well. In 1 John it says so much about that. Some of the fruit is to believe the right things about Jesus. Some of the fruit is living a godly life rather than an ungodly life—as we lived before we were saved. And also some of the fruit is

to love God our brothers and sisters in Christ. So God assures us in His word by making promises to us, which is the main way. Then God assures us in our lives by changing them toward Him and toward His will. And God assures us, according to Romans 8:16, by God the Holy Spirit who assures us deep within our hearts by testifying with our own human spirits that we are God's children. How good God is. In the Word He says, "I love you and gave my Son for you." He also truly works in our lives and brings forth in us love for the Son and love for other Christians. And then within us, the Holy Spirit testifies, "I love you. I love you. I love you. You are my daughter. You are my son. You belong to me and I belong to you." It is a beautiful thing. So the Holy Spirit applies salvation to us in this way as well. He assures us of our adoption.